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AND AS THE YOUNG HALF-BLOOD STOOD PROUDLY ERECT, BIG HORN BUCK, RIFLE
IN HAND, SEEMED EAGER FOR THE TEST.

OR,

The Border Beagle's Ghost-Trail.

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"CHINCAPIN DAN" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A FRIENDLY SPY.

THE night was well spent, and silence reigned throughout the camp of Sitting Bull, high priest and mighty medicine-man of the Unkpapa Sioux. Worn and weary with the weird ghost-dance, which had been a daily performance for nearly three months past, all were sleeping soundly: braves, squaws and papposes.

The camp stood on a level tract, bounded on the south by the tree-fringed Grand River, on

the north by low hills, which curved around to both east and west.

In the center of the camp-ground rose the medicine-pole, around which the ghost-dancers circled, taking the signal from Sitting Bull at high-noon, and never ceasing until the sun disappeared from their aching eyes, at evening.

Here and there stood skin tepees, and apart from the rest rose the log shack occupied by Sitting Bull and his family.

Nearer the medicine-pole were a number of bee-gum-looking coops of bent willows, barely large enough to shelter the crouching form of a single Indian; sweating-chambers, where all candidates for the ghost-dance, whether bucks or squaws, undergo their diurnal purification.

All this is indistinctly lighted up by a few camp-fires, now burning low and casting out little heat. Yet, near the fires are lying a number of human forms, with but a blanket or skin to guard them from the frozen ground and the still keen and frosty atmosphere.

"Dollars to cents the boy's one of 'em, too!" mentally growled a muffled shape, crouching behind one of the sweat-lodges. "Not because there isn't room enough in the wicky-ups, but for the glory of the Indian Messiah—save the mark!"

Nearly an hour before, the spy had crossed the hills lying to the north, creeping, crawling, avoiding the patches of snow left from the recent storm, lying low in the deeper shadows until satisfied that a still closer approach was within the possibilities. For no man knew better than he how surely his life would pay the forfeit in case he was discovered within those lines, without one to vouch for his friendliness. Even he for whose sake this risk was being run—would he not lift hand to slay, rather than voice to save?

"It's a toss-up, and there isn't another man I'd run the same risk for," muttered the spy, his keen gaze passing from figure to figure of those lying near the smoldering fires. "At the best, I'll get no thanks for it, but—the boy's worth saving, and save him I will, in spite of his teeth!"

Right or wrong, the spy had finally fixed on one of those blanket-enveloped shapes as the person he was seeking, and seeing nothing, hearing nothing to indicate that his movements had attracted dangerous notice, he rose to his feet and noiselessly glided forward.

A dark blanket shrouded his form and covered all but a single eye. From head to foot he looked the Indian, and now that he was fairly within the camp, only an accident or his own imprudence was likely to expose the cheat.

The spy drew near to where that selected shape was lying, but even as he started to lie down beside it, one of the Indians near at hand abruptly lifted himself on an elbow, giving a guttural ejaculation.

"Ugh! it is cold, brother!" muttered the spy, lying down close to the back of that motionless figure, as though to borrow part of its animal heat.

"It will be warm enough when the Messiah comes," mumbled the other, as his head lowered, all suspicion banished by that perfect accent.

For some little time the spy lay motionless, only making his next move when the heavy breathing told him the Sioux brave was once more bound with slumber's chains. Then, one hand stole softly over the man lying before him, parting the heavy blanket until his cold fingers touched the lips of the sleeper. A slight shiver gave him warning, and with hand ready to close over mouth, he softly whispered:

"Silverblade—Davie—son of Weenamoo!" His hand closed tightly over that mouth in time to smother an exclamation, and then he swiftly breathed in earnest tones:

"Not a word, unless you're hungry for my scalp, Davie!"

That the spy was no coward, his present situation plainly evidenced, but the next few moments were terribly trying to even his nerves of steel. A single cry, an involuntary start, even, would almost surely rouse some of those slumbering braves, and their suspicions once aroused, detection would be inevitable. And that, under existing circumstances, would mean death, none the less sure because dearly bought.

The shiver that ran through the form his breast was touching, told the spy his voice was recognized; but would past friendship prove strong enough to overcome present enmity? Would—

"Go! before they find out!"

Only ears sharpened by peril could have distinguished those words, but the spy heard, and drew a long, free breath. A tingling glow shot through his hardy frame, chilled by long scout-

ing, added to contact with the frozen earth. It seemed as though he had passed into the genial warmth of a heated chamber.

"Davie—boy pard!"

"Go! Are you mad, that you come here?"

"I had to come. I told Little Sure Shot I'd find you."

"Enola! You have seen— Go, Big Horn!" cutting his own question short. "You are white, but I would not see you killed. Go, while the path is open!"

"Then you haven't clean forgot old times, Davie, boy?"

"Davie is dead. I am Silverblade, the son of Weenamoo. I am all red now!"

"So you think, but you're fooled lad," with the ghost of a laugh, despite his perilous situation. "If you were all Injun, you'd spit out your war-cry, and make a hot grab for my hair! And so—"

Silverblade turned over, so as to face his strange visitor, but either that movement, or their subdued whisperings, seemed sufficient to rouse the brave who had but a few minutes earlier addressed the spy, and with an impatient grunt, he lifted his head, staring drowsily around by the dull glow of the camp-fire.

In his turn, the spy gave a grunt and uneasy squirm, then, in low, husky tones, he muttered a snatch of the ghost-dance chant:

"Father, father, our hearts cry out to you!"

"Father, father, we are—wait—"

His voice died away in a prolonged snore, and neither he nor Silverblade stirred a muscle as the Sioux staggered to his feet, to pass them by and give the fire a kick with his moccasined heel.

For all, they watched his movements, and both breathed easier when he lay down on the opposite side of the fire, too far away to catch their guarded whisperings.

Silverblade noiselessly passed a fold of his blanket over the head of the spy as they lay with faces almost touching each other, then repeated his warning to flee.

"Not without you go with me, Davie," came the whispered reply. "I've got more to say than I can tell you here."

"I have but one answer: I am Silverblade. I wait for the Indian Messiah. Go, before I forget that I once was white! Go, before I call aloud to Sitting Bull that the Border Beagle is a spy in his camp!"

"If he's the mighty medicine-man he claims to be, he surely knows I'm here," half-mockingly breathed the spy. "Since he don't kick, why need you worry?"

"He'd kill you like a dog!"

"Unless some of his bucks got in the first lick—don't I know it, lad? And so—come with me, if only far enough away from the gang for a free word or two."

"You have said all that lips can say, and I have given you my final answer. I am no longer white. I am red—all red!"

"I promised Enola to find you, and tell you—"

"Tell Little Sure Shot that Silverblade will come when the Messiah gives him leave. Until then—go, Big Horn, or the days of life that are yet yours, will be less than as many seconds!"

"I'll go, when you bear me company, Davie. If you won't do that, I'll just wait until you yelp out, or until the sun shows my face to your dandy bucks!"

Although so softly spoken, there was a grim determination in those words which Silverblade, thanks to past associations, could not ignore. He knew that Big Horn Buck meant every word. He knew that, unless he himself should yield to a degree, the Border Beagle would doggedly await discovery, even if he did not actually invite it by throwing off all disguise.

"If you stay, you will surely die! And Silverblade will die with you, brother. Is this your wish, Big Horn?"

"Not if I can make it pan out different, Davie, be sure! I love life as dearly as any man can, and the past month has shown me something which makes it still better worth living."

"Would you have the young squaw blacken her face and throw ashes upon her head? Then—go, Big Horn!"

"With you, Davie, or never."

"If found here, we will both die!"

"I know it. And that means a mighty sight more to me than to you, Davie, since this mad craze has captured you. With me, once dead means dead all over, while you—"

His lips were sealed by a deft hand, but there was far more of friendship than of anger in that

touch, and instinct told Big Horn that he had touched the right chord at last.

As a ghost-dancer, and firm believer in the doctrine preached by and of the Indian Messiah, death had little terrors for Silverblade: for would he not rise again, made forever whole by that glorious voice? He was red—all red, now! He believed, he had perfect faith, he was a true worshiper of the Coming King.

But this man whose breath was mingling with his, whose heart kept time with the beating of his own pulse, had not a drop of Indian blood in his veins. He was one of the proscribed, surely doomed to death at the coming of the Messiah, unless he took warning and fled across the salt waters in time. And should he die now—

"Which is it, Davie?" softly breathed the spy, quick to improve the advantage he fancied he had won. "Shall I kick the cover off and call for my last supper, or will you go out for a bit of a chatter?"

"Silverblade will go—a little way," came the reluctant reply, his hand drawing those muffling folds tighter lest that glad chuckle reach less friendly ears. "Is Big Horn a little boy, that he laughs aloud when his tongue should sleep soundest?"

"Who wouldn't laugh when he's tickled clean through, from top to toe, stem to stern, and all the way back again? Why, Davie, boy, I'd—"

"Silence!" sternly breathed the Ghost-Dancer, then drawing away the blanket-fold, to add in a whisper: "I will go with you, brother, to save your life, but it must be in my own way. Is that good?"

"Any way, just so we get there, Davie."

"Then, hide your face in your blanket, and follow closely. Make no sound, say not a word if any brave rises up to ask whither we go. Let the Shoshone answer. Does my brother agree?"

The Border Beagle nodded assent. Now that he seemed in fair way of winning the point for which he had aimed, he could be as cautious as he had been reckless.

"It is good," nodded Silverblade, as he lifted his head to cast a wary glance around them, over the sleeping red-skins. "Big Horn is not all fool!"

Seeing nothing to indicate espial, Silverblade silently rose to his feet, then gently kicked the spy as a signal to rise up. It was acted upon, and muffled in his dark blanket, the Border Beagle looked fully as much the Indian as did his young companion.

"Come!" whispered Silverblade, moving cautiously away. "If any one calls out, run for your life, I can't save you!"

CHAPTER II.

SILVERBLADE, THE SON OF WEENAMOO.

"ALL right. I'll run fast enough when I have to. And if it should come to that, Davie, don't forget that you jumped the game! Whoop, and yell, and waste your cartridges like a jolly good Injun, for—"

"Too much chatter!"

Silverblade emphasized that reproof by a grip on an arm with his strong if slender fingers, and Big Horn Buck left his sentence unfinished. Reckless as he was, he knew that they were in a critical position. Let one of those proverbially light sleepers rouse up sufficiently to take note of their movements, and explanations would be next in order. His disguise was perfect, in its way, but he knew it would not bear too close an examination. That left only fight or flight as an alternative, with Silverblade to pay the double penalty in case he should succeed in making his escape.

With all this passing across his mind, the Border Beagle wished for discovery as little as did Silverblade himself, and as they passed further from the smoldering fires, entering the denser shadows, his breath came easier, and there was a ripple of laughter in his voice as he whispered:

"I surely can't be as bad as you try to make out, Davie, or your guardian spirits wouldn't let me slip through their fingers so easily. Or, have they got such a dead open-and-shut on us poor whites, that they scorn to take count of our movements?"

"You forced me to come, or see your death," coldly spoke Silverblade, pausing, with arms folded across his chest. "I am here. What word has Big Horn for the son of Weenamoo?"

"Heap sight more than would be safe to spit out so near yonder braves," whispered Big Horn Buck, with a glance of real or counterfeit uneasiness in the direction of the fires. "Come a bit further, lad."

Once more the young half-blood complied, but

pausing for the second time when the northern edge of the level tract was neared.

"This is far enough, brother," he said, checking Big Horn, who showed a desire to press on up the hillside. "Even if seen by the Sioux warriors, they could not get here quick enough to trap the Beagle."

"They'd have to be mighty lively on foot, that's a fact," nodded Big Horn, though he seemed to be reluctant to halt. "And yet—my horse is just across the ridge, Davie. Why not—"

"There is no David Woodbridge here. He is dead. I am Silverblade, the son of Weenamoo, and grand-son to He-That-Fights-Long. What does Big Horn want with the Shoshone?"

"To pull him out of the fire the devil's stirring up for just such crazy boys!" almost harshly muttered the other, his blanket dropping to reveal the strong, bold face of a white man, despite the mask of paint overlaying it.

"There is a fire, but it threatens the pale-faces, not the red. Let Big Horn flee, for the danger is his, not mine."

"Still the same old song, Davie?"

"It is truth. What my brother's lips shape are lies."

"I'd shape any other pair of lips with my fist, for hinting that same, d'ye mind, Davie?" with a low, grim laugh.

"Did Silverblade ask Big Horn to come here? Does he bid him pause to listen, even?"

"That helps me swallow the lie you fling in my teeth, pardner," the spy nodded, one hand going out to grasp that of the half-blood, his face and voice both proving his sincerity as he rapidly added: "I knew it would be as much as my scalp was worth, to be caught playing spy inside this camp, just as matters stand, David Woodbridge; but I just *had* to do it! I couldn't stand quietly by and see a lad like you sacrifice himself without a word being said to lead him back from the drop. And so I tell you, boy, turn back while a chance is left you!"

"Silverblade hears, but he does not heed. His face is turned to the light. Why should he turn again to the dark?"

"It's the fires kindled by the devil himself that makes what you call the light, boy!" almost harshly muttered the Border Beagle, his grip tightening until it seemed as though that slender hand must be crushed to a bloody pulp. "I tell you that the end is coming mighty fast, boy! I tell you you are doomed to a certainty, unless you break away from these red devils who—"

"Silverblade is red—all red!"

"I ask your pardon, Davie," his voice growing milder. "I mean no slur against your mother's race. There are good Indians, of course, but Sitting Bull is not one of them, and—"

"Sitting Bull is my chief, my master, until the Indian Messiah comes. Not even Big Horn can make Silverblade listen to such hard words."

"All the same, they are gospel truth, and I only hope you'll live long enough to find that out, Davie. You surely can't have changed so much in these few weeks that you can't recognize the plain truth when it is spread before your eyes. And so I say again: the end is drawing near when all this bother must be paid for—paid for in blood, too! I hate to think it, but what else can I do?"

"The time has come, Davie, when every red-skin must come back under the wing of the law, or pay the penalty. All mild means have been tried, to put an end to this ghost-dancing, and now—"

"Is this all Big Horn came to tell Silverblade?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"If it was new, perhaps," with a short nod, "but it has all been spoken before, and not once alone, but many times. Each time Silverblade gave Big Horn his answer. We still think the same. The Shoshone will never change his mind. Then—good-by, brother!"

"Wait, lad!" exclaimed the Border Beagle, catching the half-blood by an arm as he turned toward the still sleeping camp. "I have not told you what your sister said, when I saw her last. And your father bade me—"

"Silverblade has a mother, but no father. That tie was broken when the Indian Messiah called to his child."

"If I thought that, boy, I'd be tempted to turn my back on ye, and let the devil claim his own!" sternly said the spy, his eyes glowing vividly. "Never a lad had a better father than you! Never a man had a less grateful son than Luke Woodbridge has found in his David!"

"You are wrong, Mr. Horton," said the half-blood, for once giving way to the white blood

which he assiduously strove to smother. "I loved my father—I still love him—but he is all white! He is one of those accursed by the New Messiah, and unless he flees, as I warned him, he must perish with the rest! And I—am Silverblade!"

Once more the young fanatic turned toward the camp, and once again he was checked by a strong hand.

"Then you refuse to hear what your people said, Davie?"

"Not if Big Horn will tell their words. Silverblade only refuses to hear his religion abused."

"It surely needs abusing, when it leads its disciples to certain destruction, boy," frowned the spy, but adding quickly, in milder tones: "All right, Davie! I'll touch lightly on that point, if you'll bear me company over the ridge, to where I left my nag."

"Why go so far? It is safe to speak here."

"I can't talk mild with those shadows smarting my eyes, pardner," flashing a glance across the level to the tepees. "It's too nearly morning for more sleep. Go with me that far, lad. Surely it's not too much for me to ask of my old friend?"

"Once there, will it not be yet a little further, Big Horn?"

"I won't swear I'll not ask it, but I'll not try to force you a foot further, Davie," with a short, uneasy laugh as his keen eyes flashed a glance toward the eastern sky, where the light of a new day was making itself visible. "Come, brother?"

"To your horse, then, but no further."

Seemingly glad to win even so much, Big Horn Buck breasted the slope, closely followed by the half-blood. Both were eager to pass beyond range of the camp, though for very different reasons.

Although Buck Horton was ten years the older, he and David Woodbridge had long been close friends, and this liking had been strengthened by certain events which had taken place within the last few months.

At that time, he who now called himself Silverblade, was living in peace and harmony with his parents; a Shoshone mother, a white father, on Woodbridge Ranch, near the Canada line. Then the ghost-dance craze was spread that far, by emissaries of Sitting Bull and others among the discontented Sioux, and the half-blood, barely twenty years of age, was quickly infected with the mad fever, and finally joined a delegation selected by the Crees, the Shoshones, the Grosventres and Bannocks, to seek out the fabled Indian Messiah, with one who claimed to be a chosen mouthpiece of the Coming Man.

This was Wah-pa-doo-tah, or Red Leaf, of the Brule Sioux, according to his own account; but Big Horn Buck declared that he was a white man in disguise, and father to a certain John Godfrey, who led an evil gang to rob and murder Luke Woodbridge, and abduct his daughter, Enola.

This outrage was foiled by the Border Beagle, as the detective was called, but Wah-pa-doo-tah escaped, to turn up later as an introducer of a fictitious Messiah to Silverblade and his delegation.

In answer to questions put him by the crafty chief of the Grosventres, the false Messiah declared that the pale-faces should all be destroyed at his coming, while every one of red blood should be resurrected, to enjoy eternal life and unbroken bliss. And so, after partly retracing their steps homeward, the delegation resolved to advise their people to wait patiently for the millennium, since they could gain nothing more by joining Sitting Bull, as the Indian Messiah advised.

At that, failing to change their prudent resolution, Silverblade left the delegation, and hastened to offer his services to the mighty medicine-man of the Unkpapas.

It was on his way to Standing Rock Agency that he luckily found Big Horn Buck in the power of a gang of cut-throats, who were trying to hasten the outbreak by plundering the Friendlies. Silverblade partly repaid the debt he owed the Border Beagle, by rescuing him from Dave Darnell's gang; but when safety was won, he once more firmly refused to turn back to his home, and pressed on to join Sitting Bull's band of ghost-dancers.

Doubtless something of all this was passing through the minds of the two friends as they crossed the ridge and made their way toward the spot where Big Horn Buck had left his horse before venturing into Sitting Bull's camp on the Grand. And no doubt these reflections helped each to bear with the other in the event soon to come.

"Silverblade has come so far, but his foot goes not beyond," quietly spoke the young Shoshone, as they paused near the tethered horse.

"I'm thankful for that much, Davie," was the swift response. "I'd be almost too happy to live, if I could coax you to go still further!"

"Your road is not mine, Big Horn."

"And if you were any one else, I'd be mighty glad of it, too! For, Davie, lad, can't you see where your road is leading you? Are you so utterly blind that you can't realize what is ahead of you, unless you turn aside while there is time? *Death*, I tell you! Don't you *know* that the soldiers are flocking in, by whole regiments? Can't you *see* that it's worse than madness to even dream of fighting? Why, boy, even if every soul of the Sioux tribes were to take to the war-path, they'd be only a single mouthful for the soldiers!"

"So Long Hair thought, but Sitting Bull was the one to laugh, when all was over."

"And he took precious good care not to risk his carcass where a bullet might jump all the laugh out of him, too! But he's had his turn at laughing, and now—"

"What do you mean, Big Horn?" sternly demanded Silverblade, gazing keenly into that stern face by the increasing light.

"I mean that he'll have to pay the penalty for kicking up this nasty racket, of course," muttered Horton, abruptly changing his manner, conscious of having betrayed too much for prudence, with his aim still unwon. "I'd shout glory to that, only for *you*, lad, and a few other honest simpletons who've been led astray by the craze."

"Listen, Big Horn. You call this a craze. You say I am a fool. I say *you* are the mad one! For a long time I doubted. I wanted to believe and have faith, but I could not smother my white blood, so soon. I prayed to know more. I prayed that my eyes might be opened to the truth, whether for good or for evil. And my prayers were answered!"

"I stood face to face with the Indian Messiah. I doubted him, even then, until he graciously gave me the proof I needed. I saw, I heard, I knew! I went there a sick-hearted doubter. I came away, with my heart overflowing with faith, a profound believer. Now—can you still ask me to turn aside? Can you still beg of me to stray back to the White-man's Road?"

"I do beg it, Davie, for your sister and your father's sake, if not for your own. Your life, if not their lives, depends on your next step. If you listen to reason and turn back—"

"I listen to the voice of the Messiah, and press on!"

Big Horn Buck cast another uneasy glance toward the eastern sky, already growing rosy with the rays of the climbing sun. He seemed strangely uneasy, and as Silverblade made a movement as though to turn away on his way back to Sitting Bull's camp, he shot out an arm and gripped the youth by a shoulder, hastily muttering:

"Wait, Davie, lad! Don't go yet, for I've not told you the messages your people sent you by my lips."

"There is no time for further talk, brother. The sun is rising on a new day, and there is plenty work for—"

Silverblade broke off abruptly, with a shiver and a gasping cry.

For, across the range came a faint, shrill cry, closely followed by the sound of firearms, all coming from the camp of Sitting Bull!

"Too late, Davie!" cried Big Horn, with gloomy delight in face and voice as he caught the half-blood by each arm. "Sitting Bull is dead, or a prisoner to the Indian police by this time!"

CHAPTER III.

SITTING BULL'S LAST SLEEP.

ANOTHER camp, on that same night, but in only one respect does it resemble that under Sitting Bull: it is composed of Indians.

Where the ghost-dancers were sleeping, these were never more widely awake. Where the followers of the Unkpapa high priest had cast aside everything of pale-face manufacture save their firearms and knives and hatchets, these warriors, none the less of Indian blood, wore the livery of Uncle Sam in greater or less degree, and seemed proud of their brass buttons.

In a word, a camp of the Indian police.

The horses were near at hand, but their trappings had not been removed, and they seemed, like their masters, only awaiting the signal to take the road.

Nearly hidden by the rocks and bushes, burned a small fire, around which were grouped

half a dozen men in blankets, for the most part smoking their pipes, yet betraying a restlessness foreign to the traditional red-man.

"Do they think Sitting Bull is a soldier, who never knows he has had sleep enough until the horn blows?" growled one of the number, flinging out his left hand with an impatient gesture. "They think it is always time, until it is too late."

"It will be time for a race, not an arrest," grumbled still a third. "Why are we waiting, Bull Head?"

The eyes of the last speaker, together with those of his comrades, turned upon the one who just then rose to his feet, leaning forward, one ear bent with a curved palm behind it, in keen listening. Only for a single breath, then his muscular form drew erect, and with what was nearly a laugh of grim pleasure, he made answer:

"For what is coming, brothers!"

There was no call for explanation, for their trained ears had also caught the far-away echo of hoofstrokes falling rapidly on the frozen ground, and they knew that the signal for which they had been waiting so long and anxiously, was near at hand.

Bull Head, lieutenant of the Indian police stationed at Standing Rock Agency, advanced to meet the rider—for those hoof-beats were now near enough to be counted, and they came from a single animal.

"We are waiting—'Tis you, Gray Eagle?"

The title came in a tone of strong surprise, as though Bull Head had expected an altogether different person; but the reply was prompt enough, as the reckless rider jerked his steaming horse back upon its haunches:

"'Tis Gray Eagle, yes! You looked for Louis Primeau? Well, he might have brought the same word, but *he* would not have asked to join you, Bull Head, as a policeman."

"What is the word you bring, Gray Eagle?"

"To do your duty!" came the swift response.

"And that is?"

"To arrest Sitting Bull, dead or alive!"

"You bring this word, Gray Eagle?"

"I bring this word, and I will help you make it good! Why not? Is wrong right, just because the squaws of Sitting Bull had the same mother as Gray Eagle? He is a dog that has been barking too long. He is too big a coward to bite with his own teeth, but he makes other teeth very sharp, and very hungry. So—it is time!"

"The soldiers are coming, then?"

"They are coming, and their captain bade Gray Eagle say this to Bull Head: Arrest Sitting Bull. If he is wise, good. If he is foolish, better!"

Even now Bull Head seemed hardly satisfied that the brother-in-law of the Unkpapa high priest could be thoroughly in earnest, though he had long known that there was no great love lost between the pair. But the grim chieftain seemed determined to banish the last lingering doubt, for he leaned closer to the lieutenant of police to whisper:

"And Sitting Bull must be *made* to act foolish! Alive, he would still be a poison-thorn, but dead—*then* he would be a good Injun, for our side! Is it not so, brother?"

"You would shoot him, then, if he tried to run away?"

"Why wait to see him start? He is old. He has had his time. He keeps calling for the New Messiah. Well—send him to find what he prays for!"

Before Bull Head could make reply to this sanguinary hint, his first sergeant, Shave Head, came forward to ask:

"Is it bad word? We are to turn back, now?"

"The word is good, and we go on," curtly spoke the lieutenant, then bidding Gray Eagle repeat his report.

That did not consume much time. He had left Fort Yates in company with two troops of cavalry, under command of Captain Fouchet, at midnight (Dec. 14, '90). The soldiers, numbering one hundred, were guided by Louis Primeau, a half-blood Sioux, and head farmer for the Indians located at Standing Rock Agency.

Having covered a sufficient number of the forty odd miles, to make sure he could cover the distance in good time, Captain Fouchet sent Gray Eagle on ahead, to bid the police under Bull Head make the arrest without unnecessary delay. In case the misguided followers of Sitting Bull should show fight, or attempt to rescue their high priest, the cavalry would support the officers in performing their sworn duty.

When Gray Eagle ceased speaking, there was a brief silence. Bull Head bade his men pre-

pare for the road, and then their tongues began to wag. Not one, but nearly all made grimly jocose predictions that Sitting Bull would be taken—not living, but dead!

Where every unit is of the same mind, a body moves rapidly, and those few remaining miles were swiftly covered. There was no sign of dawn to be detected in the East, when the Indian police drew rein less than half a mile from the edge of Sitting Bull's camp, sending a couple of scouts ahead on foot, to make sure the crafty old medicine-man had not added one more triumph over his enemies to his already long string of victories; but that fear was quickly set at rest.

The camp was not deserted. The skin tepees were occupied, bucks lay around the smoldering fires, ponies were tethered hard by. Sitting Bull was sleeping his last sleep.

"It is good—very good!" grimly uttered Bull Head, as he received this report. "Sitting Bull bade his followers prepare for a long ride when the sun came up again. He said they must go to the Bad Lands, at once. Well, Sitting Bull must show them the right trail; he shall be the first to go to the 'Bad Land!'"

There came a subdued laugh at this grim jest, but each member of that band—only a score in all—gave his pistols and Winchester repeater a careful examination before taking another step.

They knew what they had to expect. They knew that, unless Sitting Bull himself bade his followers stand back, in peace, a desperate fight lay before them. The odds would be heavy; at least five to one, without counting squaws or half-grown youths. If it came to a fight, and the soldiers failed to arrive in time to support them, they knew hardly one of their number could count on escaping with life.

Yet, not a man of the twenty faltered or hung back when Bull Head passed the word to advance, to surround the log cabin in which they all knew the medicine-chief had his headquarters.

No time was wasted in giving orders. Each one of the police knew what was to be done, and was ready to carry out his part of the ugly job. And so, without a sound to waken one of those dance-worn warriors, the police stole forward, surrounding the rude shack of logs, their weapons drawn ready for instant use.

By this time the day was dawning. The eastern sky was turning red with the beams of the rising sun, and surrounding objects were distinctly visible to those trained eyes.

With a silent gesture Bull Head motioned his chosen men to follow closely, then lifted the blanket which hung across the opening cut in the logs of the cabin, as a doorway. He tossed the blanket over a projecting knot, thus letting more light into the single room, exposing to view the slumbering priest, his squaws, and a half-grown son.

With a swift step, Bull Head gained the side of the medicine-man, rudely grasping him by an arm, giving him an upward jerk as he spoke:

"I arrest you, Sitting Bull! Get up, dress, and come with me!"

The chief, bewildered by this abrupt wakening, stared at those dimly visible shapes with a dazed expression on his wrinkled face. He mumbled something—even their keen ears failed to distinguish just what, for one of the squaws, giving a shrill screech of terror and rage, rushed out of the cabin before a hand could check her steps.

She gave the alarm, screaming shrilly, urging the startled bucks to rally and rescue their high priest. And then a shot was fired—it stung Bull Head keenly. He did not wait to learn from what quarter it came, but instantly shot Sitting Bull. And almost at the same instant another of the police, Red Tomahawk, also shot the now struggling prisoner. And, with one bullet in his brain, the other in his body, Sitting Bull fell limply from their hands, even as they dragged him across the threshold and into the open air.

All this took place with the rapidity of thought, but even so soon the ghost-dancers were rallying, rushing to the rescue of their chief, wielding each the weapon that first came to hand.

The Indian police drew together, showing what discipline will do, even with such naturally lawless material. Shoulder to shoulder they stood, firing rapidly yet with marvelous coolness in the face of such heavy odds, not one betraying a wish to flee or take cover while the voice of their chief remained silent.

That fierce rush was checked, then the ghost-dancers were driven back, in confusion. They

lacked a head, as yet, and could hardly be said to know what had or was happening.

Bull Head, staggering and sick with his wound, forced his way to the front, flashing a glance around, as though summing up their chances. The situation could hardly have been more critical, and his brain was yet sufficiently clear to see the impracticability, of making their way back to their horses, incumbered as they were with the body of Sitting Bull.

There was but one hope, and that he promptly grasped.

"Go!" he cried, giving the nearest policeman a shove that sent him out of the grim line. "Ride fast—bring soldiers! Say Bull Head will hold Sitting Bull, dead or alive!"

The Indian darted forward at the word, firing as he ran. But a bullet from the rifle of Little Assinaboine laid him low in death.

"Go you!" thundered Bull Head, pushing another man forward with his left hand, at the same time shooting Little Assinaboine through the brain with the revolver in his right. "Open a way for him, brothers! Sitting Bull loved the dance—send him *real* ghosts to amuse him in the Bad Lands!"

CHAPTER IV.

SILVERBLADE, THE HOSTILE.

As the young Shoshone caught those ominous sounds from the camp out of which he had been so adroitly decoyed, a hoarse, gasping cry escaped his lips, and he was taken with a shivering fit that temporarily robbed him of his strength.

"I had to do it, Davie!" cried Big Horn Buck, as he grasped his one-time pard by the arms, with the purpose of holding him back from a suicidal rush across the range. "I couldn't save you in any other way, and so I—"

"You knew—you led those devils to— Hands off!" with sudden fierceness, his limp muscles hardening, his eyes fairly aflame as he grappled with the detective.

"Don't—you can't help—"

"Then I can die with Sitting Bull!"

Buck Horton was a man in the prime of life, gifted by nature with far more than average strength of body. His muscles had been toughened by a free, wild, active life, and in his rare moments of boasting, he had proudly declared that never yet had he met his master in feats of strength or of skill.

Compared with him, the half-blood was but a stripling: tall, but slender, his arms showing but slight muscular development, his waist round and slender almost as that of a growing maiden. But now—it was not a boy, but a demon of steel-like nerve and activity that grappled with the Border Beagle; and before Big Horn Buck could even begin to put forth his strength, those slender legs were twined around his, tripping him up, bearing him backward, to strike the frozen ground with a sickening jar.

Even then the older man might have turned the tables and accomplished the end for which he had risked his life, but in falling, his head came in contact with a rock, and though his skull was partially protected by a fold of the heavy blanket, the shock was sufficient to kill any ordinary man.

His muscles relaxed, and he lay a quivering heap, wholly at the mercy of the infuriated half-blood.

"Devil!" snarled Silverblade, his fingers sinking deep into that muscular throat, as he drew up his knees to plant them on the shivering arms of the Border Beagle. "I trusted you—you betrayed me! You stole my honor—I'll drink your blood!"

He freed his right hand, using it to snatch a gleaming knife from its beaded sheath. The weapon rose above his head, then shot downward.

Buck Horton was helpless. That heavy blow had robbed him of all consciousness. Even had his arms been free, he could not have lifted a finger to save himself. Yet—he did not die!

Silverblade was unable to entirely check that vicious blow, once it began to fall, but his hand turned aside, and the keen blade clove the frozen earth in place of the brain it had been aimed at.

Once more the white blood which Silverblade had so long fought against, gained the upper hand. That hideous red mist passed from before his eyes, and with a shivering gasp, he left the knife sticking in the ground, springing to his feet, then reeling dizzily back from that unconscious form, hoarsely panting:

"I can't—I called him brother! I can't kill—"

Only for the trunk of a tree against which he staggered in his temporary blindness, Silver-

blade must have fallen to earth. As it was, he leaned against that support, shivering violently, sick at heart, his brain in a dizzy whirl of mad confusion.

But then, dimly at first, growing louder, plain-er, the sounds of desperate fighting at the camp of Sitting Bull forced its way to his brain, and with a choking gasp, he rallied his bodily powers.

He never so much as cast a glance toward the man whom he had overthrown in that moment of madness. He had ears, thoughts, only for what was taking place across the range: the post which he had deserted, just when his presence might have been the most valuable!

"The police!" he cried, and with that word the mists seemed to break away from his brain, and with a shrill, fierce yell, the Shoshone sped up the slope, bent on saving his master or sharing his fate.

More time had passed than Silverblade as yet realized. To him that period of awful dizziness just now seemed no more than the span of a single breath; but it had been long enough for hot and bitter work to be wrought down yonder where Sitting Bull had mustered his ghost-dancers.

Silverblade began to realize something of this as he gained the ridge, from which his first glimpse of the battle-ground could be won; for now the Indian police apparently were in a state of siege, having taken full possession of the log cabin and a few of the nearer tepees, out of which they were firing at the yelling, screeching ghost-dancers, who seemed afraid to close in and end the fight by one deadly struggle.

"The devils have killed Sitting Bull!" was the first thought that flashed through the brain of the young Shoshone as he marked the situation; and he did not take time for another, but dashed at reckless speed down that rock-strewn slope, sending his shrill war-cry in advance.

A bullet hissed past his face as he sped across the level tract, but he paid no attention to this. Instead of seeking cover, as the majority of the hostiles had done, Silverblade rushed straight across to where his keen eye had recognized one of the chieftains who had sworn allegiance to Sitting Bull: Thunder Strike, the Brule.

"Where is Sitting Bull?" he hoarsely demanded, to shrink back with a gasping cry as the grim old warrior replied:

"In yonder, dead or a captive!"

No need of the gesture which indicated the log shack. Silverblade realized the very worst now, and it seemed to clear his brain and steady his nerves, so sorely shaken by that terrible misfortune.

"There are others in yonder!" he said, with a laugh and backward toss of his head, as a bullet plucked at his long, loose hair.

"Bull Head's police—yes! Down, or they'll count yet another coup!" harshly muttered the chief, jerking the half-blood behind the sweat-lodge that afforded his own body an imperfect cover.

Silverblade made no reply. He was peering through a break in the woven willows, summing up the situation with a celerity that proved him a natural fighter. And having done this, he was no less prompt to act on what he saw.

"We must rescue our father if living, avenge him if dead, chief!"

"But how? 'Tis sure death to close in, without cover, and—"

"Then we must die!" came the fierce retort. "If we hold back like this, soldiers will come, and sweep all before them! I will make cover for my brothers! Let them watch—then act!"

Before Thunder Strike could divine his purpose, Silverblade sprang to his feet and ran to the nearest camp-fire, where the butts of logs and sticks were now sullenly blazing. He caught up one brand in each hand, swinging them about his head until the flames shot out with a crackling roar. He sounded his war-cry, then darted straight toward the log shack, the open doorway of which was veiled by the blue smoke of burnt powder.

"Here is cover, brothers! Fight the devils with fire! Charge, and avenge our father, for—"

The blazing brands shot away as his grip relaxed at a volley of shots from the shack. And without even a death-cry or groan, Silverblade, the Hostile, fell forward upon his face, red blood marking the little patch of snow in which his face was half buried!

It was a madly bold attempt, and though many of the ghost-dancers caught at the idea—knew that it surely must prove successful if once the cabin could be set on fire—not another

among them all was ready to offer up a like sacrifice.

For sacrifice it must be, even if the one making the effort should succeed in firing the building. He could not escape with life, from all those firearms!

They sent a storm of lead upon the shack, yelled fiercely, cursed savagely after the white man's fashion. And then—the chance was lost forever!

For yonder sounds the call of a trumpet, and knowing that soldiers are coming to support the Indian police, the ghost-dancers, bucks, squaws and papposes, all break away for their ponies, mounting in hot haste, and dashing up Grand River, bound for the Bad Lands!

The second policeman sent forth by Bull Head had done his work right well, meeting the cavalry under Captain Fouchet, and urging them to full speed even while making his report.

Rapidly as the soldiers rode, they reached the battle-ground too late to take part in the fight. With ponies prepared for the journey to the Bad Lands, with everything made ready the night before, the hostiles were already out of sight, and safe from pursuit on their fresh ponies.

"Sitting Bull is here," reported Bull Head, making the regulation salute, himself a true soldier, despite his four wounds.

"A prisoner?"

"Yes. The best sort of prisoner," was the grim response.

The once powerful high priest of the Unkpapas was a corpse, and while there may be some just comments made on the manner of his killing, very few who have kept his bloody, treacherous, evil record in view, will ever let fall a word of blame for his slayers.

He was only partly clothed, and as Gray Eagle, among others, stood gazing upon the lifeless body, that loving brother-in-law grimly said:

"He was a great medicine-man. He said he was very wise. He lied! He was a poor fool!"

"Quiet, chief!" frowned the captain. "He is dead, and—"

"Why he never put on ghost-shirt, to turn bullet, eh?" chuckled the savage, turning away with a shrug of his blanketed shoulders. "That why Gray Eagle say—him big fool!"

Though lasting barely half an hour, from the first shot to the last, it had not been a bloodless victory for the brave squad of police. Now that they had time for breath, time to sum up their losses, more than one fiercely smiling face turned grave and sad. For, of the twenty Indian police who attempted that arrest, four were killed outright, and three others badly wounded.

Bull Head had received four wounds, and his first sergeant, Shave Head, fatally injured.

Despite their hasty flight, the hostiles had carried off an unknown number of their wounded, besides leaving Sitting Bull and son, Crow Foot, and five other corpses on the battle-ground.

The soldiers were busy collecting the ponies left behind by the escaping ghost-dancers—many of them painted and decked for the war-path—when Big Horn Buck, the Border Beagle, came staggering across the range.

He was still feeling the effects of his fall, and his face was a grim mask of paint and blood, but he apparently had no care for himself. He hardly paused to make himself known when sternly challenged by one of the soldiers on guard, but passed along to where the dead Indians had been ranged in a double row.

He fairly held his breath while making that swift examination, for he felt almost certain he would find Silverblade among the slain. And when he failed to see the face he feared, he reeled away, fairly sick with the reaction.

Partly to rally, partly to remove his paint, Big Horn Buck passed over to the river, the cold bath greatly refreshing him, while making him far more presentable, as a white man.

When this was done, and while preparations were being made for removing the dead and the injured to the Agency, Horton passed among the police engaged in the fight, seeking to learn something about his young friend, if possible. He did; from the lips of grim Bull Head.

Though so seriously wounded, the lieutenant of police had taken note of everything within his range of vision, and he had not overlooked that desperate attempt made by the half-blood.

"Silverblade is dead. I shot him. He was a man, though but a boy. If all the ghost-dancers had been like Silverblade, we would have been eaten up, long before the soldiers came up."

Big Horn Buck turned away with a sinking

heart, but even yet he would not despair. Until he stood beside his corpse, he would think of his boy-pard as living.

"And I'll save him from himself, even yet! I swear it!" he vowed.

CHAPTER V.

THE GHOST OF SITTING BULL.

"WHAT is it, orderly?"

"A ranchman, general, who claims that his business is of the utmost importance."

"To himself, no doubt. Tell him to wait. I'm engaged, just now."

The orderly turned about on his heel with the regulation salute, but before he could withdraw, another voice uttered the words:

"Hold on, pardner! And you, general, don't try to make company out of me. I can wait. And it's from just such callers as this that you'd ought to pick up your most reliable news."

"It's another complaint about stolen stock or fired hay-stacks," frowned the officer, but glancing toward the orderly, to add: "Did the fellow let drop his business, sergeant?"

"Not in my hearing, general. Unless—"

"Go on," frowned his superior, as the orderly paused with just the shade of a smile flitting across his well-schooled face.

"He said something about Sitting Bull's ghost, general, I believe."

"Then it's a drunkard instead of a fool?"

"Maybe not, general," ventured the other occupant of the room, adding in swift, earnest tones: "This fits in with the report I was making, General Miles, and if I might advise—"

"Show the fellow in, sergeant. See if you know him, Horton," in lower tones, as the orderly left the room. "If he should be one of the gang you started to tell about, just slip outside and bring in the guard. Understand?"

Big Horn Buck nodded assent. There was no chance for more. The heavy tramping told of an approach, and as the Border Beagle fell to one side, partly bending over an unfolded map lying on a desk, the sergeant ushered in a burly ranchman, who seemed ill at ease in the presence of that stately representative of Uncle Sam.

"You may go, sergeant. And you, sir, what can I do for you?"

"Waal, giner'l, 'tain't so mighty much me, as 'tis—rope my hind laig ef I know jest what it is!" spluttered the stockman, dropping the cowboy hat which he was clumsily twirling in his fingers, then slapping a heavy foot upon it as though he expected a gust of wind to send it whirling far away over his accustomed prairies.

"Steady, pardner!" came in swift warning from the Border Beagle, who had come to know what that dark frown meant. "Tighten your cinch, or you'll catch an everlasting dump. Show your brand, then round up on the jump. Sabe?"

"Do you know this man?" asked General Miles, turning toward the border detective.

"Not by name, but his pedigree's all right, or his face lies. Head up, pardner! What do you know about Sitting Bull's ghost?"

This was hardly "according to Gunter," and had another man taken such a liberty, the chances are that he would have met with a snub, if nothing worse. But as the embarrassed stockman caught quickly at the hint flung out, General Miles let that infraction pass, for the present, at least.

"Thar ye hev it, giner'l! An' ef 'tain't his ghost, then what in holy time kin it be?"

"Do you claim to have seen the ghost of Sitting Bull, sir?"

"I claim to hev see'd somethin', giner'l, an' ef 'tain't a ghost, then I hain't the only fool up our way."

"What way is that?"

"Up on the Bad. You see, giner'l, I've got a ranch up yan' way, an' though thar's bin a pesky sight o' skeery talk flyin' through the a'r, o' late, I hed too much wuth layin' 'round loose, an' I jest made out I never hear'n nothin', an' stuck to my sawin' wood. 'Course I heard tell o' old Bull's ketchin' his mortal, an' I did take time fer one whoop o' glory, but then I played like I wasn't mindin' whether school kept or not. Fer, ye know, giner'l, thar's a good big grist o' Injuns on an' nigh to the Bad. An' though they've hild purty stiddy, as yit, I cain't rightly say they hain't bin doin' right smart o' talkin'."

"You mean the Two Kettle Sioux?"

"Them's the ones, giner'l."

"I have them marked as friendly and reliable."

"Waal, I reckon that didn't flatter 'em so turrible much, giner'l, up to a couple days gone by," nodded the ranchman, now feeling thor-

oughly at home, and plainly relishing his chat with such a high official. "But now—a mighty sight o' harm kin be kicked up in a hurry, boss!"

"You mean to say that the Two Kettles are breaking faith?"

"Waal, not quite so bad as *that*, giner'l. An' yit, I don't know!"

"Then why are you here?" sharply interposed General Miles, frowning sternly. "Orderly!"

"Here, general!"

"Show this fellow out, but keep an eye on him while he finds out just what errand brought him here. When he knows what he wants to say, bring him in again. That will do."

"But, giner'l—"

General Miles had already turned to Big Horn Buck, and the orderly sergeant deftly hustled the bewildered ranchman out of the room.

"Go on, Horton. You were saying?"

"Something that would have led me into your Bogardus-kicker, general, I'm afraid," laughed the Border Beagle, with a slight nod toward the door, beyond which the ranchman was still trying to expostulate.

"Not you," with a passing smile. "There's only one method of dealing with such cattle, unless time is a drug on one's hands. That is to scare the main fact out in a lump, then guess at the fragments."

"I suppose you do hit the truth, once in a while, general?"

"Why not invariably?" smiling despite himself, at that look of childlike innocence.

"Because it isn't human nature," with a sharp nod. "I set that fellow on the right trail, and if you had humored him just a bit, he'd have given in his report, straight as a string, if a bit lengthy, and then went away ready to swear you were a little tin joss on ten wheels. But now—my report, general!"

Big Horn Buck tersely narrated the events leading up to the death of Sitting Bull. Not that the general was hearing the news for the first time, but a military report is one thing, that of a confidential scout quite another.

"It was a put-up job, of course," said Horton, in conclusion. "The police never intended taking Sitting Bull alive. Three times their force couldn't have done *that*, without Bull's helping them off. They went there to kill the old sinner, and his followers simply played right into their hands, from the jump-off."

"I've seen the order sent to Fort Yates, and—"

"I don't even hint that the soldiers knew what was in the wind, until all was over, general," quickly slipped in the scout. "But, even if they *did*, it was best and wisest. While Bull lived, peace was impossible. With him dead—well, I had brighter hopes than I have now, if the truth must be told. Bull dead, will give us more trouble than Bull living, unless the right means are taken to lay his ghost!"

"You sing that foolish song, Horton?" laughed Miles, scornfully.

"I've plenty of company, general, as I'll prove to you, if you'll give me permission to talk a bit with that ranchman."

"What about?"

"Nothing more than to put his trouble into shape. He wouldn't have come so far for nothing, general. May I fetch him in?"

General Miles nodded assent, though there was a skeptical smile on his face as the detective crossed the room.

He was not kept long in waiting. The door opened, and after the indispensable salute, the orderly ushered in the two men.

"This is Tom Hetlund, general," said Horton, gravely introducing the abashed stockman, who meekly bowed before that martial figure. "He brings an important report from Bad River, and only awaits your permission to speak."

"What is it, my good fellow?"

Brief as had been his absence, Big Horn Buck had put the minutes to good use, as was now evidenced. Hetlund came to the point without delay or beating around the bush.

He was running a stock ranch near the Bad. A division of the Sioux, known as the Two Kettle band, were stationed not far from his place. Up to the killing of Sitting Bull, they had remained friendly, taking no part in the ghost-dancing which had spread on all sides of them.

But on the night of the 18th December, or three days after the death of Sitting Bull, a number of the tribe were returning home from a friendly gathering, when they witnessed a truly startling spectacle.

A bright light called their attention to the not distant hills, and as they were trying to make out its nature, all were amazed by seeing what

appeared to be the illuminated figure of an Indian, hovering just clear of the crest.

Then, as they stared in speechless wonder, the vision began jumping or floating from hill-top to hill-top, passing through the air like a sluggish meteor, all the time making emphatic signs in the direction of the Bad Lands, as though urging the petrified spectators to flee thither without further delay.

"And how did they know this marvelous vision was the ghost of Sitting Bull?" asked General Miles, his full lips curling.

"Thar was them in the gang as knowed him better'n they knowed thar own faces, giner'l," gravely nodded the ranchman. "An' they broke out in a heap, callin' the critter Sitting Bull—no less!"

"And you really put faith in this hobgoblin, Hetlund?"

"The Two Kettles do, anyhow," his eyes drooping doggedly. "They spread the news in a hurry, an' when the sun come up, rope me fer a maverick ef the hull herd wasn't turned ghost-dancers! An' ef they don't do heap sight wuss'n *dance*—ef they don't take to makin' us lonesome critters dance to bloody music!—then we're in mighty sight bigger luck'n I ever hope to hit on!"

"You think they intend breaking away, to join the hostiles?" asked General Miles, impressed in a degree by that gloomy earnestness.

"Ef they don't, 'twon't be fer lack o' urg'in', giner'l. Ghost or no ghost, that thing keeps peggin' away at 'em, every night. An'—mebbe you'll reckon I was drunk, boss, when I say it, but—I've see'd the darn thing with my own two lookin' eyes!"

"Sitting Bull's ghost?"

"I've see'd *the thing*, ghost or no ghost. I tuck a couple shots at it, short range, too! An' when *them* never even fazed the critter, I up an' broke fer Rapid City, an' you, giner'l!"

There could be no doubting the fellow's perfect earnestness as he uttered these words, and General Miles was swift to say:

"I thank you for coming, Hetlund. Keep all this to yourself. Don't get to talking it over, even with your nearest friend, until I've given you permission. You understand?"

Hetlund nodded assent, and after receiving orders to report twice each day to the orderly, General Miles dismissed the ranchman.

"Well, Horton, what do you make of it?" he asked, turning abruptly upon Big Horn Buck, a half sneer, half frown marking his strong face.

"If you ask my candid opinion, general, I'll say this much: Sitting Bull dead, is going to make you army gentlemen a mighty sight more trouble than he ever did while living; and that is needless."

"Of course it is only another cunning trick, but—who hatched it out? I'd give a month's salary to know just that!"

"It may cost a great deal more than that sum, to say nothing of good lives that can be less easily spared, general," seriously spoke up the Border Beagle. "You know what Bull claimed, in life: that he was the chosen representative of the Indian Messiah, empowered to act as such, until the time was fully ripe for his advent?"

"So I've heard. Of course the old rascal lied."

"Which don't take the keen edge off, all the same! And so I say it over: unless that ghost is laid, and well laid, too, Sitting Bull is going to make us all still worse trouble than we've had, up to date."

"How can a ghost be laid that is no ghost at all? Who can do it? Even if one were self-confident enough to try, how and where could he find a starting-point?"

Big Horn Buck listened in silence, a faint smile creeping into his strong face as he watched the officer striding to and fro. But as General Miles paused to meet his gaze, Horton coolly said:

"I'll take the job, if you give me *carte blanche*, general."

CHAPTER VI.

THE BORDER BEAGLE'S THEORY.

"You will?" ejaculated General Miles, his eyes opening widely.

"With your permission, sir, I will," bowed Horton, calmly.

For a full minute their eyes met, but the Border Beagle never flinched, and the general knew he was not speaking at random, wild as his proposal might otherwise appear.

"You know something about this spook business, then, Horton?"

"I never heard that Bull was walking the

earth in spirit shape, if that's your meaning, general," with a little laugh. "Until Hetlund opened his budget, I fancied Bull was where I saw him planted: under six good feet of solid earth."

General Miles took a seat, signing the border detective to do the same. Then he spoke again: "Out with it, Horton! You've got a theory of some sort. If you don't know, you suspect. What is it?"

"Have you an hour or so to spare, general?"

"Two of them, if you can throw any light on this matter. Unless a stop is put to this spook business, we'll have every Sioux in the two Dakotas taking to the Bad Lands, or we'll have to play Chivington over again!"

"And have to fight the humanity-shriekers after wiping out the red angels," laughed Horton, but with a bitter echo to his words. "It was bad enough in Colonel Chivington's time, but *now*—go away, trouble! The wild and woolly West would back you up, to a man, general, but the Eastern people—who never passed through an Indian war, who never saw a genuine red-skin until Buffalo Bill reached out for their round dollars—would everlastingly swamp you!"

"Don't I know?" with a wry grimace. "But let that pass. What is your theory, if you really have one, Horton?"

"I'll give you the facts first, then you can help lick a theory into shape, general. It will take some little time, but I'll boil it down as best I can. So—here you have it:

"I struck my first clew while attending to a bit of professional business, up near the Canada line, last fall. I was after a brace of law-breakers, and finally came across them, father and son. They were both playing a part, after their own fashion, but each with one eye to the same general end."

"The son called himself John Godfrey, and that name will fit him as well any of the dozen he laid claim to, off an on. He was bothering with an old friend of mine: Luke Woodbridge, a farmer and fine-stock grower, on an extensive ranch. There was a woman in the case, of course, and through her, Godfrey hoped to get his grip on Woodbridge Ranch when the racket died away."

"John knew that Woodbridge had a goodly amount of money under his roof, and by promising them all that, he picked up a gang of cut-throats who agreed to do his dirty work. They were to kill the father, son and mother, fixing matters so that the deed would be laid at the door of the Sioux. They were to carry off the girl, and John was to rescue her, in true heroic style. Then, wooing, wedding, taking possession, and all that; you understand?"

General Miles nodded assent, but rather impatiently.

"Interesting enough, no doubt, but hardly what I'm waiting to hear."

"I said it would take time, but I'll get there, if you wait a bit, general. That was John's part of the programme, but I helped knock it into pi. I arrested John, and took him across the border. I lodged him behind the bars, and washed my hands of the affair. None too soon, either! Two nights after I received my receipt for the prisoner, a mob broke into the jail, and John went up a tree!"

"Now for the father: Zeno Godfrey while playing with white skin, Wab-pa-doo-tah, medicine-man of the Brules and mouthpiece of the Indian Messiah when figuring as a red-skin."

"I've heard of the fellow. Sitting Bull ought to have him as company," grimly muttered the general.

"Maybe they're closer together than you imagine—spirit-ually speaking," laughed the Border Beagle.

"What! You don't mean—What do you mean, Horton?"

"That, if my theory holds water, Zeno Godfrey knows just how the ghost of Sitting Bull took to skipping over the hills, general. And I'll tell you why I come to this conclusion, if you'll have a little more patience."

"Go on. You're worse than Tom Hetlund, but if you can prove your hints well founded, I can well afford the time."

"All right. As I said, both father and son had their own parts to play, though each reached out toward the same end. By that I meant the Godfreys were doing their level best to fan the fire, hoping to bring on a general conflagration which would sweep all these lands clear of settlers, both white and red. And then, when prices went down to less than nothing, the syndicate would step in with their money-bags, and—Catch on, general?"

"You can't really mean it, Horton?"

"It is a scandalous fact, and I stake my reputation on it, sir," his voice growing grimly earnest, his eyes glowing with poorly hidden rage. "The Indians have to bear all the blame of this outbreak. They will have to pay the penalty, too! And yet, true as the sun shines in the heaven above us, general, all this racket is kicked up as a money-making scheme! I can give you names and figures, as well as facts, if you ask for them."

"Not now. Later, perhaps, if any good can be done by probing the matter. Just now—I'm thinking more about this spook business!"

"It's a slice off the same pudding, general," with a short, hard laugh. "It's only another version of the Indian Messiah, and the same knaves are pulling the wires. And Zeno Godfrey, *alias* Red Leaf, the Brule, is one of the head schemers!"

"He went up North as an emissary of Sitting Bull, to spread the ghost-dance craze among the Shoshones, the Grosventres, the Crees and the Bannocks. He played his part so well that three delegates were elected by each tribe, to hunt up the Indian Messiah, and report what truth there was in those marvelous tales."

"One of those led astray by the devilish arts of this Red Leaf, was David Woodbridge, son of my old friend. He was a half-blood. His father was pure white, but his mother was a full-blood Shoshone, daughter to a once noted chief, He-That-Fights-Long."

"I've heard of him. He is dead, I believe?"

"Luckily so, yes. If living, you'd have the Snakes hissing long ere this," with a short, hard laugh. "Davie—he changed his name to Silverblade, the title given him by his Indian mother—was one of the delegation who followed Zeno Godfrey, in search of the Messiah."

"They found him, too! Let Red Leaf alone for that! There was an actual vision: another ghost, like this one of Bull's, of course! And after Silverblade emptied his Winchester at short range into the ghost, he became a firm believer. How was it done? By magic lanterns, I fancy, though I can't say for certain."

"The delegation turned back, firm believers in the New Messiah, but as he had assured them that, at his coming, all dead Indians should be restored to life, even as all of white blood were to be wiped from the face of the earth, the cunning knaves resolved to lie low and wait for the millennium to catch them up. Why fight, why enter on a winter campaign, when everything was sure to come out right without that? And of the entire delegation, only Silverblade obeyed the command to join Sitting Bull and his ghost-dancers."

"On his way down here, Silverblade saved me from stretching hemp at the hands of a gang of cut-throats who were doing their level best to help on a general outbreak by robbing and abusing the Friendlies. And it was through my trying to show Davie how foolish his craze was, that I solved the secret of the Indian Messiah, and hit off the scent which I firmly believe will lead me straight to this ghost of Sitting Bull!"

"A roundabout trail, and it has brought you to the point I'm most interested in," nodded General Miles, with a half-smile. "You believe this is more magic-lantern work? You think the same hands are pulling the wires?"

"I am ready to stake my reputation on that, general. I know at least three of the fellows who played the Indian Messiah, on that occasion, and I know they had others to help them. I know that, taken in a lump, they could talk to every tribe on this continent in their own dialect. I know that they are hired by capitalists to fan a general outbreak, so that big money can be made by buying up ranches and farms and claims. I know that they are playing in with the Indian traders and agents for that one grand end!"

"Never mind. Don't press that point too hardly, just now, Horton," frowned the general, lifting a hand. "Stick to your text, please. You say you are willing to take the job of laying Bull's ghost: what are your terms?"

"Nothing, if you hint at pay, general," was the quick response. "I have marked Zeno Godfrey for my next game, and at least two of his fellow-schemers are wanted by the law. If I can run them in, I'll be amply repaid for my trouble."

"How can I help you, then, since you ask for no reward?"

"By giving me permission to enlist such Indians from Pine Ridge Agency, as I may require to carry out my plans."

"How many do you want?"

"Make it a round dozen, to cover all emergencies, though I hardly think I'll need more than

half that number. Give me an order on General Brooke for that number, to be selected by myself. Give me a pass, written and signed by yourself, authorizing me to enter or leave the army lines at will, without being obliged to render an account of my plans or purposes. Will you do this much, general?"

"Aren't you making it rather broad, Horton?" hesitated Miles.

"No broader than I deem strictly necessary. You ought to know how news is spread, in times like these, general. You can't sneeze in privacy, without every hostile in the Dakotas knowing it, before the echo dies away!"

General Miles laughed at that remark, though none knew better than he how little exaggerated it was. He turned to the desk, taking up a pen and dipping it into the ink. He hesitated a few moments, as though weighing the matter in his own mind, but then he dashed off the orders asked for.

As he intimated, it was great trust he was risking, but he had known the Forder Beagle for years, and felt that he could be trusted, if any man might.

"There you are, Horton," passing over the important papers. "Do your level best and bring Bull's ghost straight to me if you catch it. I'll hang it, as an example to other restless spirits!"

"If I fail, general, I'll leave my ghost to keep Bull company!"

Glancing swiftly over the papers to satisfy himself that the contents fully met his ideas, Big Horn Buck folded them and carefully stowed them away, then gave his thanks to the general.

"Maybe I've been a bit off-hand with you, general," he added, with an apologetic laugh, as he rose from his chair. "But I'm more at home on the trail than at court."

"Never mention it, man! I only wish I had more such trailers as you have shown yourself, Horton. You ought to become attached to the army, and if you like—"

"I couldn't work in shackles, general, thanking you all the same. I would lose my scent, sure! I'd make a miserable army scout, but I'll try to prove myself as good as the best, outside of the ranks."

"Well, every man to his own taste. Do the best you can, Horton, and if you succeed in laying Bull's ghost, I'll forgive you for not being in the regular service," laughed Miles, pleasantly.

"I'll do my level best, general," bowed Big Horn Buck, passing from the room, to complete that sentence to himself: "For the law, not the army!"

As he left the building, he caught sight of Tom Hetlund, the Bad River ranchman, and quickly joining him, he asked further details of the ghostly resurrection of Sitting Bull.

He questioned the ranchman until that worthy had nothing further to impart, then took pains to obliterate all memory of his curiosity by filling Hetlund full of whisky.

"He'll never remember me, but oh! what a head he'll have to-morrow!"

CHAPTER VII.

LITTLE BIRD AND SILVERBLADE.

ONLY one of that hasty volley of bullets struck Silverblade, but that was enough to put an end to his fighting, for that day at least.

Thunder Strike saw him fall, and felt a pang of angry pity at the untimely fate of the youth who dared the attempt no one cared to imitate. The grim old chief sent more than one bullet into that blue veil of smoke on a blind hunt for vengeance, and when the call of the bugle warned both friends and foemen that the cavalry were coming, it was Thunder Strike who risked his life rather than leave the boy-brave there for the Indian police to triumph over.

Even when mounted on his war-pony, with Silverblade lying across his sinewy thighs, Thunder Strike never once thought of the half-blood as other than a corpse. But he began to come nearer the truth when, fairly clear of the camp, and with no signs of immediate pursuit on the part of police or soldiers, he took time to examine the youth.

Though hit but once, Silverblade seemed dead. The lead had struck him just at the edge of his hair, over the left temple, apparently braining the poor fellow; but not so. Cut to the bone, bleeding freely, the son of Weenamoo was still alive!

Thunder Strike lingered to learn but little more than the bare fact; now that battle had been offered, he knew that safety lay in the Bad Lands, if anywhere. Short of that natural fort, they were liable to be intercepted and cut off; from refuge, if not from life as well.

Hastily clapping a poultice and bandage around the skull of the unconscious youth, he placed him in charge of and on the same pony with Little Bird, his daughter, thus more equally dividing the weight. And in her charge, Silverblade covered many a weary mile that momentous day.

The son of Weenamoo was musing over this escape on the evening when we meet him again, something more than a week after the killing of Sitting Bull.

He showed the effects of that wound in more than one way. His hair had been cut away from the lips of the wound, over which a patch of cloth had been stuck with balsam. His face seemed thinner, his eyes sunken, his form a little less robust. For he had lost a great deal of blood, and though that bullet had glanced from his skull without fracturing it, the shock had been a serious one.

And now, once more able to care for himself, Silverblade was mentally admitting that he owed two great debts: one to Thunder Strike, the other to Little Bird.

"He carried me off, she brought me back! I would never have woke up, only for her nursing. I owe her a life, such as it is. Can I ever repay Little Bird?"

Silverblade frowned moodily as he asked himself that question; not *how* he could repay the debt, be it noted, but if he could ever do so.

While so carefully nursing him back to life and reason, poor Little Bird had unwittingly betrayed herself, and almost the first thing Silverblade grew conscious of, after that horrible stupor was fairly broken, was that in saving a life, the Indian maid had lost a heart.

She was barely sixteen years of age, but she was already a woman in the eyes of many a promising young buck, and it was the fault of Little Bird alone that she was still an inmate of Thunder Strike's tepee. Not that the old chief was at all anxious to have her go away. She was his only child, since his one son died, and for that reason he had taken her away from the Agency school where the boy caught his last sickness.

"It is *not* good. The White-man's Road leads to the grave!" the superstitious chief declared, for once in his life closing his ears to the earnest pleading of those red lips.

There had hardly been time to mourn over an education cut short, for the ghost-dance craze spread over the land, and now—Little Bird had learned what no school could teach her, out of books!

"She is pure, she is true, she is earnest," Silverblade mused, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes downcast, taking no heed whither his slow steps carried him in the deepening twilight. "She saved my life, when I must have perished without her care. She is all red, all Indian, all I have tried to make myself—except—"

Silverblade gave a sudden start, coming to a halt with hands mechanically seeking the pistols at his waist, his eyes flashing a keen glance in the direction his ears pointed out.

He caught the sound of a familiar voice, raised as though in anger, and as he halted, he heard a second speaker: not clearly, but out of that husky mumble he could pick his own name.

The voices came from beyond a scattering fringe of evergreens by which the valley was rendered a little less barren in looks, and without waiting for more, the young Shoshone stepped swiftly forward, parting the dark green wall, and taking in the situation at a glance.

Only a few paces away stood two figures—male and female—and as he looked, Silverblade saw the right hand of Wah-pa-doo-tah, medicine-man of the Brule Sioux, shoot out to clutch the wrist of Little Bird, just in time to check her flight.

"Not yet, my star!" he said, with a low, wicked laugh, drawing the struggling girl toward him, as though for a close embrace. "You must hear me through, now I have—The devil!"

His first words were shaped in the Sioux tongue, but the last two were decidedly blunt English. For just then two sinewy hands fell upon his arms, and he was not only robbed of his plump prize, but sent spinning a dozen feet away.

"My father forgets himself and his sacred office," sternly said the Shoshone, facing the medicine-man. "Did the Great Spirit bid him abuse a squaw?"

"You, is it, David Woodbridge?" hissed the knave, his right hand already gripping a revolver.

"I am Silverblade. Are you Wah-pa-doo-tah, or Zeno Godfrey?" coldly asked the half-blood.

The medicine-man shrunk back at that name, but instead of lifting to a level, that weapon sunk a bit lower.

"Why do you interfere when your help is not wanted? Go your way, son of Weenamoo, and give thanks that your right hand is not even now withering on its stump! Go your way, or—"

"Little Bird will go, too!" murmured the maid, her hand touching the half-blood, gently. "Come, son of Weenamoo!"

Wah-pa-doo-tah started forward as though to arrest the girl, but Silverblade kept his place between, an open hand going out to check the rascal as he sternly spoke again:

"If Little Bird wishes to hear, father, she has a tongue to say so."

"No! Little Bird has heard far too much already! Red Leaf hisses like a poison snake! His words are bad—all bad!"

"Then Little Bird will go with Silverblade, until she is safe with Thunder Strike," quietly decided the Shoshone.

"If I say not? If I say Little Bird shall remain with me? Who are you, boy, to say such big words? Why, you infernal sapling!" once more permitting his fierce rage to drive him into his native tongue. "I'll break you across my knee, if you dare step in my path!"

"Will you try it on now, or shall we look for a more retired spot?" coolly asked the half-blood, also in English. "I bow to the office, but I laugh the man to scorn, when he shows himself in his natural colors. When and where will you have it, Zeno Godfrey?"

Swiftly as those words were uttered, Little Bird caught their purport, and springing between the two angry men, she hastily spoke:

"Offer a blow, and Little Bird calls to Thunder Strike!"

Wah-pa-doo-tah smothered his anger for the time being, and after a mock bow to the young couple, he turned away, striding swiftly toward the tepees pitched near the center of the inclosed plateau.

"Shall we follow, Little Bird?" asked Silverblade, after a brief silence.

"If he goes to hiss bad words into the ear of Thunder Strike, the chieftain will call for his child," quietly said the girl, flashing a glance into that still stern face, then drooping her eyes like one abashed. "Did Silverblade hear much?"

"Only enough to tell him that Little Bird wanted to fly away. What did Red Leaf say to frighten her so badly?"

"He is not red—he is white, a dirty white, like muddy snow!" the girl exclaimed, with a pettish stamp of her moccasined foot. "Why is he here, where all should be red?"

"He is one chosen by the Messiah, Little Bird. Silverblade knows, for his eyes have seen, his ears have heard. Red Leaf is big medicine. Only for his teachings, the Shoshone would never have seen the Sioux."

Possibly it was because he recalled how carefully, how tenderly this girl had nursed him back to life and strength, that Silverblade cast such meaning into his glance as his hand gently touched an arm of Little Bird; but he realized his mistake the next instant.

It was only a glance; a brief meeting of eyes, and that in the twilight now deepening into night; but David Woodbridge came to life long enough for a shiver of pain and remorse, for he knew now what he had only suspected: Little Bird loved him with all her soul!

It was fortunate that, just then, a slowly moving figure passed not far from where they stood in the shadow of the evergreens, for it gave them both a fair excuse for bridging over an embarrassing moment.

"It is Red Leaf," softly whispered Silverblade, his keen vision baffling the gloom, as that dusky shape paused to glance in that direction. "Stand still, and he will think you are gone away."

"If he comes, swear that you will not fight with him!" murmured the girl, clinging tremblingly to his arm.

"There will be no fight. Red Leaf was crazy, just then, but now—see! he is going!"

"Where is he going, and for what?"

"To talk with the Great Spirit, maybe. Red Leaf is a mouthpiece chosen from many by the Messiah."

"Would a real Messiah choose a bad heart? Is there no good Indian through whose lips his words may come? For—Red Leaf is all bad! Red Leaf is a liar, a dog that howls lies!"

"Little Bird!"

"Come!" stamping her foot, passionately, then moving away in the direction taken by the prophet. "You think Little Bird is a

fool! You think Red Leaf is a god! Come, and see if he is brave enough to tell the son of Weenamoo what his lips tried to pour into Little Bird's ears, just before you came here!"

More to act as a guard than from any real curiosity as to what the angered prophet might have said concerning himself, Silverblade obeyed, and as he gained her side, Little Bird added, sharply:

"You think Red Leaf has gone to talk with the Messiah? Good! Silverblade shall have his eyes opened to the truth, for once! He shall know Wah-pa-doo-tah for the lying dog he really is!"

His curiosity roused at last, Silverblade asked Little Bird what she meant, but received no reply, in words. The girl led him rapidly forward until past the spot where Red Leaf had vanished amid the gloom, then proceeded more cautiously, keenly watching for the prophet.

But before they could fairly strike the scent, a low yet penetrating wail seemed to float over their heads, and as they abruptly halted, a light flashed up far above their level, at or very near the crest of the hill directly before them.

And as they stared in mute bewilderment and amaze, that peculiar light took to itself form and substance, seemingly, until they could no longer doubt: it was the shape of an Indian, shrouded in a blanket, each fold of which was distinctly visible, yet the whole thing appeared to be lighted up from within: it actually seemed to be transparent!

"'Tis the Messiah!" faintly gasped Silverblade, his hand falling away from Little Bird's arm which he had grasped as that wailing note, saluted their ears.

"Look! there is Red Leaf!" whispered the girl, pointing ahead, where her keen eyes had caught sight of the prophet, who turned swiftly at the cry let fall by the half-blood while sinking to his knees with hands folded tightly over his wildly throbbing heart.

If Silverblade heard, he did not heed her words. Nor did Wah-pa-doo-tah seem to see the young couple, for he quickly faced that glowing vision, kneeling with clasped hands uplifted, breaking into the shrill, unknown tongue which Silverblade had so often heard from his lips: a chant to the Great Spirit!

And, as if in answer, that wailing cry came floating downward again.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GHOST-MAKERS IN COUNCIL.

JUST as though there was a particular meaning attached to that peculiar cry, Red Leaf lowered his hands, prostrated himself on the ground until his dark-clad figure fairly blended with the earth, then rapidly crept along until a dense patch of evergreens were placed between himself and the young couple.

"One was a squaw—of course it's that cursed boy!" he muttered to himself, pausing to make sure that his last movement had not drawn those dimly seen shapes after him, as yet. "Can he suspect? Has he got the dust out of his eyes? If I thought as much, I'd—"

He left the threat unfinished, but there was little need of putting it into plain words. The manner in which his strong teeth grated together, added to his savage gripping of knife and pistol, rendered his meaning only too clear.

Then, too, that wailing sound came floating through the air, drawing his eyes toward the hill-crest, just in time to catch a parting glimpse of that illuminated shape as it seemed to dissolve into nothingness.

"All right; I'm coming, so keep your shirt on!" he growled, casting a reluctant glance backward, then gliding swiftly, silently away through the gloom, heading for a narrow defile which entered the hills, but after a short distance rising to form a sloping end to the pocket.

Once fairly beyond sight of the young couple, Zeno Godfrey—to give him the name which best fitted his recent mutterings—covered ground more rapidly, soon leaving the pocket, to pause for a backward glance. He gave a low grunt of surprise as he saw how much more distinctly objects on the plain were to be seen from this elevation, and this fact made a portion of what had gone before a bit clearer.

"They were dogging me, and, Perkins must have spied them, with his night glass," he muttered, adding an oath at his own carelessness. "It is that girl, for the boy—he's all fool! How much does she know? How long has she been watching me? If I thought—"

Another broken sentence, as Godfrey shook his clinched fist at the two dimly visible shapes on the level far below him. He could even distinguish one from the other. He could tell

that Silverblade was kneeling, with bowed head. But Little Bird stood erect, seemingly turned to a statue by that marvelous vision, now vanished into thin air.

Having partly vented his emotions by that vicious gesture, Godfrey crept rapidly away, stepping where his moccasined foot would leave the least possible trail, without making his journey too long. He felt that no common motive would have forced his confederate into thus prematurely making the exhibition on which they had counted so much.

"Why didn't he just give the signal, 'ware snakes? Why show up, if nothing worse than a couple of spies threatened our game?"

Those were the doubts that hastened his steps, and once assured that no eyes from the level could take note of his progress, Zeno Godfrey broke into a swinging trot that quickly carried him to his destination.

He paused before a pile of rocks, to utter a low, tremulous whistle, to which a prompt response was given. He advanced, and as a heavy rock was swung aside, as though on hidden hinges, he crouched low, and crept through a narrow, irregular opening muttering:

"You, Perk? What made you light up, so soon?"

"You did!" with an angry snarl in his whisper, as he swung the rock back into place. "You were coming here, of course?"

"Why not? You set the time, didn't you?"

"The time was all right. I'm not kicking on that score," his tone softening a bit as he crept after the prophet, through the dark, which was quickly broken by Godfrey's sweeping aside a double blanket which masked a fairly sizable cavern. "What galled me was seeing you leading a brace of spies straight along the home-stretch!"

"Wah-pa-doo-tah can do no wrong—oh, no!" came in grim mockery from one of several persons gathered about a burning candle. "Is he not the chosen mouthpiece of the Indian Messiah? And if he should make a boggle, why—blame the spirit, not the substance!"

"Is there anything left in the bottle, Clark?" dryly asked Godfrey, showing his teeth a bit as he glanced toward the other.

"I'm not drunk. Only wish I was!" sighed that worthy, turning his painted face from side to side as he viewed himself in a hand-glass. "Rise up, gentlemen, and let the most worthy prophet pass judgment. How do we pan out, Red Leaf?"

It formed a curious spectacle, those five men standing in a row before the prophet, gravely submitting to his close scrutiny in turn. And Godfrey was thorough in his inspection, despite the rapidity of his movements, for he gave three of the five a suggestion which was acted upon without delay.

Each one of the five men was painted after the fashion set by the high priest of the Unkpapas when he instituted the ghost dance. Each man wore a cunningly-contrived wig of horse-hair, with the white, fluffy feathers of the eagle—badge of the secret society known as the ghost-dancers—fastened to the braided scalplock. And to eyes which were familiar with the once mighty medicine-man of the Unkpapas, each one of the five offered a strong resemblance to Sitting Bull as he had been in life.

"Of course it don't call for such a close imitation, or neat work, as it would if you were to pass inspection at short range," said Zeno Godfrey, as he watched the trio carrying out his suggestions. "But the game we're playing is well worth our best efforts, to say nothing of the hue and cry which would come from the red-skins should they learn how beautifully we are making fools of them all!"

"You can preach, why don't you take more care to practice?" growled the man addressed as Perkins.

"What made you show up?"

"To save your credit, if not your hair, bluntly. 'You were heading straight for this den, and at your heels a couple of spies were walking, bold as you please! You need a lesson, Godfrey, and if it hadn't called for too much risk on our side, I'd have let her went, right then! Were you drunk, or merely sleeping?"

"How do you know I was being followed, or spied upon?"

"My eyes told me, no less! I was looking for you, to finish making our arrangements for the show. I saw you coming, and then I saw more. I had my night-glass with me, and that told me beyond all doubt. Who is that girl, Godfrey?"

"Thunder Strike's girl, I reckon," with a sulky flash in his greenish-gray eyes. "She wasn't playing spy on me. She was out spooning with that mongrel, Silverblade."

"Little Bird, eh?" with a short, dry laugh that matched his shoulder-shrug to perfection. "I almost knew it, and—Godfrey?"

"You say it."

"I'm going to. That girl is capable of more serious things than playing spoons, old man! I've seen her three different times within a short quarter of this den, and each time she seemed to be hunting for a trail. Whose, do you reckon?"

"You don't mean it, Perkins?"

"I've got to, all the same. And when I saw that one of those dogging you was a girl, I reckoned it called for more than a bare signal to 'ware shakes! Sure as death, mates, that girl has dropped to at least a part of our little game!"

"If that's so, I'd hate to insure her life!" grimly nodded Theron Clark, while another, Pierre Crevier by name, contributed:

"That part belongs to you, Red Leaf: give her a dose of medicine!"

"And another for the cub, unless Godfrey loves him better than he does his own life—and pocket!" said Tom Acton.

"Haven't you a vote to chip in Link Seymore?" snarled Godfrey, his eyes flashing from face to face as its owner spoke, to pause on that of the fifth man.

"Me too!" croaked the one singled out, with a slight nod of his wig-decked head. "If the girl knows or suspects, and she was playing spoons with Silverblade, as you asserted, of course the cub is just as wise: and a mighty sight more dangerous."

"Well, I'm inclined to think you're right, mates," said Godfrey, after a brief pause, during which his glittering eyes sunk to the bare rocks at his feet. "I had good reasons for wanting the boy to live, but they're blasted, now. He's past the useful stage, I reckon, and so—die goes! Only, let me do the job with my own hand!"

"Just so it is done, in good time," gravely nodded Perkins, adding quickly: "And now, to business, mates! We've set enough fool' reds to dancing, and what has come of it? The murder of Sitting Bull, on whom we counted for leading the Sioux into the Bad Lands, for a war of extermination. He's gone, but others remain, just as crafty, and a mighty sight better for fighting, when it comes to that!"

"Come to it it must, or we've risked our lives and wasted our good money for nothing," gloomily said Godfrey. "I thought the soldiers would jump at the chance to get even for Custer, but Miles—devil fly away with him this night!"

Perkins made a sign, which sent Link Seymore out of the cave, and then he said, with his dry, sneering laugh:

"You look at him as only a soldier, Godfrey, but haven't you heard a whisper about the presidential bee buzzing in his bonnet? If that is not all a newspaper lie, Paddy Miles will do as little killing as may be, let the temptation to even-up be never so good."

"He's making too mighty clean a record for us, though!" growled Crevier. "He's slinging his troops around so as to circle the whole lay-out, and unless we get in our work in a holy hurry, we might as well call it a fizzle, and break for tall timber while there's an opening in the lines wide enough for gentlemen of our size to steal through!"

"Fact, though I hate to admit as much," frowned Perkins. "Miles is hemming us in, and pretty soon all will be ready for the grand round-up. We've worked hard for our wages, but unless we can do still more, we'll never make more than that same. And I counted on a million, at the very least, when the divvy was made!"

"There is only the one way, that I can see," moodily chipped in Zeno Godfrey. "That is to coax or drive the Indians into breaking for the Bad Lands. It can be done—it must be done! We're paid to bring on a general war, and we've got to earn our money!"

"Well, if playing ghost can do the trick, all's ready whenever you give the word, pardner. If this gang can be led to make a break through the lines, there'll be fighting enough to set all the other bands on fire. I reckoned the killing of Sitting Bull would do the job, but that seems to be called a family affair; the Indian police has to bear the blame or wear the praise, just as one looks at it."

"Everything is ready, then?" asked Godfrey, casting a quick glance around as he uttered the words.

"All ready, when the bell rings, and if there's any curiosity in your red children, down yonder, Wah-pa-doo-tah, I'm thinking we're in big luck that such is the case, too!"

Godfrey sprung to his feet with a smothered

oath, as a faint sound came to their ears, despite the rocks, which covered them over. It was a confused murmur, as of breaking waves or human voices, loudly lifted.

"What's that?" he ejaculated, at the same time springing toward the blanket-screen, as though with the intention of rushing to the outer air; but Perkins checked him with his dry laugh.

"Your little girl and her lover have carried the news, I reckon, Godfrey. Dollars to cents the whole pot-and-boiling of 'em are swarming across this way, eager to see what Sitting Bull looks like since his translation!"

By this time there could be no longer a doubt as to what made that swelling sound: it was a chorus of excited voices, coming from the circular valley in which the refugee hostiles had pitched their camp, after breaking away from the Agency at Standing Rock.

"They've told, for sure!" snarled Godfrey, tearing aside the screen, but glancing back toward Perkins, who seemed annoyingly calm. "Show me out, Perk! Unless we can know just what those red devils mean to do, we're worse than helpless! Curse it all, man! are you made of ice?"

"Nor of dynamite, my explosive friend. Can't you wait until Link brings in word? I sent him out, on just such a chance, and now—Here he comes!" as a heavy foot was heard crushing the gravel with which the narrow passage was thickly strewn.

"Time up, mates!" spluttered Seymore, entering hastily. "They're swarming this way, wild to see the ghost of Sitting Bull!"

CHAPTER IX.

HOW SILVERBLADE CARRIED THE NEWS.

The instant that wailing sound met his ears, the young Shoshone was, to a certain degree, prepared for what followed. He had heard the same sound before, far away toward the land of the setting sun. And then, as now, the weird plaint was followed by a still stranger light on the hills.

All doubts which might have come from those almost fierce half-hints flung forth by Little Bird, were swept away by that cry, that silvery light; and even before that phosphorescent glow began to take shape to the startled eyes of the Indian girl, Silverblade sunk to his knees with a harsh, choking cry, his hands pressing in a cross above his wildly-leaping heart, his head bowed down in mingled shame and adoration.

Once more he was all red, all superstition, all blind belief and unreasoning faith in the Indian Messiah!

Little Bird was affected almost as powerfully, though she stood erect, and, as the false prophet fancied when he paused for a backward glance before making his escape complete, proudly defiant. But that was only in seeming. She might almost be said to have been petrified by that marvelous vision, for vision that strange light had become.

As though that pale glow had lessened the gloom which hung over the level, Little Bird had caught sight of Red Leaf, but even as she uttered his name, a pointing hand calling Silverblade's attention that way, the Shoshone dropped her arm, to hoarsely gasp:

"'Tis the Messiah!"

Startled, awed, Little Bird turned her gaze upon that light, and was held spellbound while it lasted.

She had heard of the Indian Messiah, and the manner in which he had at different times revealed himself to those who sought further light. She had believed, after a listless fashion, but that faith had received a serious shock of late, thanks to the actions of Wah-pa-doo-tah, who was generally accepted as a chosen mouthpiece of the Coming Man. But now—she saw!

Not the same vision which had converted Silverblade from an unwilling doubter to a fanatical believer: that had worn the silvery hair and long beard of a white patriarch: this was—

"The murdered chief! 'Tis Sitting Bull!"

The words seemed torn from her throat, and then the spell grew too strong for aught but a fixed gaze that saw, yet saw not.

If Silverblade heard her gasping speech, he gave no sign. His head bowed lower until his wounded temple touched a frozen clod. His fingers seemed trying to reach his heart, to still its furious jumping, to end that horrible choking, smothering torture.

Neither youth nor maiden saw the false prophet as he stole silently away into the cloven hill, and neither one uttered further sound while that strange vision lasted. But as the light faded, as the erect shape of the murdered high-

priest seemed to melt into thin air, Little Bird gave a gasping sigh, her knees yielding, her form sinking to the ground as her trembling hand fluttered out to catch the half-blood by an arm.

"Waken—Silverblade!" she gasped, in a voice that sounded unfamiliar to her own ears. "'Tis gone! There is—what was it, brother?"

"The Messiah! The Messiah cometh!"

"No—'tis Sitting Bull's ghost!" moaned Little Bird, her hold broken by that sudden start, her unnerved form drooping forward until her face touched the frozen earth.

But Silverblade neither heard nor saw the girl whose tender care had brought him back from the gates of death. He was neither man nor lover, just then: he was a religious fanatic.

He sprung erect as his lifting eyes failed to catch aught of that promised vision. He sprung to the right, to the left, then forward, until he could no longer doubt; the light had vanished, instead of being hidden behind some intervening obstacle.

"Father, father, I am waiting for thee!" he cried, hoarsely, lifting his clasped hands toward the now dark and gloomy crest. "Father, father, show thy holy face once more! Father, father, how hath thy poor son offended thee?"

There came no answer. The light did not return. Even the sullen rocks refused to send back an echo of that despairing cry.

Silverblade sunk to his knees once more, bowing his head until it struck the cold earth. His heart went up in prayer, none the less ardent because without words, none the less pure because so sadly mistaken.

And then, as though an answer had been returned, the young fanatic sprung to his feet and chokingly cried:

"I go, father! I will obey while breath lasts!"

Without a thought for poor Little Bird, though his moccasined foot fairly brushed her beaded skirt as he passed, the half-blood sprung away over the level, heading for the tepees where the hostile Sioux were living, where Thunder Strike and other influential chiefs were at this moment in council, trying to decide on their best course of action.

Silverblade caught sight of the little group, and with never a thought for the time-honored traditions he was thus shattering, he sprung into the fire-lit circle, uttering a hoarse, choking cry.

"What blighting finger hath touched the Shoshone's brain?" sternly demanded Thunder Strike, anger getting the better of his dignity.

"Are we squaws, that Silverblade comes—"

"He comes! The Messiah has come unto his chosen children!" cried the young fanatic, flinging out a hand toward the dark hills. "Look! He calls! He points out the way for his children to follow! The Messiah points to the Bad Lands as the place where the great battle must be fought!"

No less an excuse could possibly have saved the one who trampled so recklessly on what has been held sacred from time immemorial. But at that awe-inspiring title, every chieftain sprung to his feet, turning eyes toward the quarter indicated, to see—nothing!

"Is Silverblade mad?" fiercely cried Thunder Strike, gripping the fanatic with fingers of steel. "Where is the Messiah?"

The half-blood was staring toward the hills, as though his widely opened eyes still saw that wondrous vision, but at that touch, that harsh demand, he gave a start, and swiftly swept his free hand across his eyes, like one striving to brush aside an annoying veil.

"Where is the Messiah? We have eyes, but they see nothing but the night. Where is the Messiah, son of Weenamoo?" persisted Thunder Strike.

"He was there—my eyes beheld his glory!"

"Ugh!" grunted one of the older warriors. "Where did the papoose steal his firewater? He is drunk, like a fool!"

Those words of angry contempt did more than all the efforts of Thunder Strike, and for a brief space Silverblade came back to reason, rapidly describing the strange light, then drawing a graphic picture of—not what his eyes had seen, but what his excited memory recalled.

"'Twas the Indian Messiah! He stood upon a pillar of fire—fire that smoked, yet was powerless to burn, or even to scorch! Fire that curled up through his long beard, his flowing hair, his loving eyes! Fire that will carry death to the white-faces, even as it brings eternal life to all of red blood!"

And then, dashing aside the hand which Thunder Strike had placed upon his arm, Silverblade sprung clear of that fire-lit circle, lifting

his clasped hands and gazing upward, as he broke into the chant of the ghost-dancers:

"Father, father, our eyes are aching for a sight of thy face!

"Father, father, our hearts cry out for thy coming!

"Father, father, show our feet the right trail to follow!

"Father, father, in pity hear thy suffering children!"

Thunder Strike fell back a bit, staring at the fanatic in doubt, but others were less forbearing. Weapons were gripped, and even drawn, while harsh threats were finding birth when Little Bird, staggering like one half asleep, or suffering from illness, came within her parent's view.

"What is it, child?" the old warrior cried, as he sprung to her side.

Little Bird gasped forth a few words, broken and disconnected, but quite sufficient to set all his whirling doubts straight; and as he rushed with her toward his tepee, Thunder Strike shouted aloud:

"Sitting Bull has come back! Our holy father has come to guide his lost children! Waken, sons of the Cut-throat! Sitting Bull has risen!"

By this time the entire camp was in an uproar, and barely taking time to give Little Bird to one of the squaws who came tumbling out of the rude tepees, Thunder Strike rushed back to the council-fire, where Silverblade was still pouring forth his weird chant.

"Son of Weenamoo!" cried the old warrior, gripping an arm and giving the young fanatic a violent shake that temporarily broke that religious spell. "Show us where Sitting Bull appeared! Point out the place where—"

"'Twas the Messiah! Silverblade saw with his eyes, heard with his ears, felt with his soul! Sitting Bull is dead, but the Messiah liveth!"

As he uttered the last words, the half-blood strode away toward the hills where that silvery light had made its appearance, and after him flocked the excited Sioux, bucks, squaws, papposes. Only for a few yards. Then, having the right direction, they rushed forward, past the Shoshone, crying aloud for—not the Messiah, but for Sitting Bull!

Thunder Strike was one of those in the lead, but as the hills remained dark before his eyes, he slackened his pace as he drew nearer the edge of the rising ground. He came to a full halt, throwing out his arms as a partial barrier to that swarm of excited humanity, crying:

"Wait, children of the Cut-throat! Sitting Bull was here, but he has veiled his face with a black cloud! He is angry with his people! His wounds are still sore, and they make him forget how his sons fought to avenge his murder! He has hidden his face, because we come with yells, not with prayers for forgiveness!"

Instantly there was silence throughout that crowded mass. Each eagerly lifted head became bowed. Knees bended until they kissed the frozen earth. And then, still blind to all else, Silverblade came swiftly around that sinking mass, his arms flung out and upward, his face turned back and upward, his clear musical voice once more chanting:

"Father, father, behold thy suffering children!

"Father, father, in pity show thy radiant face to us!

"Father, father, open thy ears in mercy to our prayers!

"Father, father, our hearts bleed for thy coming to save us!"

Other voices joined in the chant, until scores were crying out the prayer each heart shaped: the words blending together until it was impossible to single out any particular sentence. But all had the same tenor, all sought the same end: the coming of Messiah, or Sitting Bull.

Then, as by magic, that strange, roaring murmur was stilled. Every eye was fixed upon the same spot; a slowly growing light near the extreme crest.

At first barely enough to catch and arrest those superstition-sharpened orbs, but gradually brightening until the glad truth could no longer be doubted; their heartfelt prayers were heard, were about to be answered!

Clearer grew that light, but even at its brightest it did not resemble any fire born of wood, coal or other earthly material; rather was it a concentration of moonshine, looking more ghostly as it increased in clearness until—

Those dancing, flickering, twining rays of silvery light were assuming shape, if not substance. Little by little they grew more compact, taking on a shape which, at length, resembled a human figure, but shining with a transparent, phosphorescent luster such as no material body ever before exhibited to those awe-stricken eyes.

Then the vision stood forth on the extreme crest of the hill, the perfect representation of a blanketed Indian, from whose otherwise bare head rose the short, fluffy, body-feathers plucked from the gray eagle; not the long flight-feathers from the wings, which remain sacred to war-bonnets, but the insignia of the Ghost-Dancers.

Silverblade stared in bewilderment at the vision, for this was not what he expected. This was not the Indian Messiah, as he recalled that holy spirit, but—

The shroud-like blanket was dropped from the shoulders of the vision, and as those naked arms flung out in an imperious gesture, a simultaneous cry burst from those excited spectators:

"Sitting Bull! 'Tis the ghost of Sitting Bull!"

CHAPTER X.

A SUPERFLUITY OF GHOSTS.

As though the loud outburst from so many lungs had sent an irresistible current of air flying up the face of the rugged hill, that vision wavered, then vanished, leaving all dark and gloomy where had risen the strange light.

A sobbing cry burst from the Sioux below, and wild cries of disappointment mingled with chanting and prayers for more—more light, more guidance, more hope!

But great though that excitement was, not a foot pressed forward to scale the hill and solve that bewildering mystery. Instead, many shrunk back. Among them was Thunder Strike, his massive figure trembling like a leaf tossed by a whirling gust of frosty wind.

Silverblade alone stood his ground, not that he was brave or less superstitious than those with whom he had cast his life-lot, but because he was literally spell-bound.

He had come to see the Indian Messiah. He had not comprehended, if he heard, those cries for Sitting Bull, or Sitting Bull's ghost. Now—this was not the Indian Messiah, as he had beheld him, far away toward the setting sun!

That had been the face and figure of a venerable, pitying white; this was the bronzed figure of an avenging red-man!

"Sitting Bull has risen! Sitting Bull is the Messiah!" hoarsely cried Thunder Strike, and with those words the scales seemed to drop from the eyes of the dazed Shoshone.

"It is true!" he cried, shrilly, flinging up his quivering hands, his feet striking the earth after the ghost-dance fashion. "Sitting Bull was dead, but he liveth now! Sitting Bull is the real Messiah! Praise ye the risen, brothers! Sing glory unto the savior of our poor people! Lo, the grave hath sent us a leader! Out of death cometh life! Sitting Bull perished, that he might save!"

How much further that fanatical delirium might have carried the misguided half-blood, it is difficult even to guess, but at that point of his crazy speech, the light came back, and the vision made itself clear unto all those straining eyes.

The same figure, with blanket trailing from the girdle about its middle, but now those hands were filled, one with the curious medicine-wand so familiar to the followers of Sitting Bull, the other grasping his blade-armed war-club.

No longer stately, statuesque, even, but swaying from side to side in the fierce war-dance, waving the holy-staff, brandishing the terrible war-club. And then dropping that weapon, stooping as over a fallen foe, flashing forth a gleaming knife and going through the motions of scalping his latest victim!

Then the vision rose erect, flourishing what appeared to be a blood-dripping scalp, and through the air shot the tigerish yell of one who has gained yet another ghastly trophy of war.

A panting cry broke from those laboring lungs as the Sioux saw this, and the crowded mass began to sway as though meditating a united rush to join their New Messiah. But before this could take place, another change occurred.

Flinging up that hand, the scalp vanished, and the ghost of Sitting Bull once more gripped and flourished his war-club, motioning toward the Bad Lands; that oft dreamed-of fortress, where so many of the misguided Sioux had sworn to fight their final battle; to there win ever-living freedom, or everlasting death.

"The time has come, children of the Cut-throat!" came the deep, stern voice of the high priest. "Death presses hard upon thy heels, but life eternal awaits ye all in the Bad Lands! Sound the war-cry, and set thy faces toward the promised land! Strike, and strike to kill! Sweep the accursed pale-faces out of the trail, and fear naught! Is not Sitting Bull with ye? And Sitting Bull dead, is the Messiah living!"

With one more flourish of club and staff in

the named direction, the light suddenly vanished, leaving the hill-crest dark and silent as before.

The Sioux stood as though still under the spell. That inaction could not have lasted long if they had been left to themselves, to follow their own inclinations; but before it could be fairly broken, a cry burst from the lips of Silverblade, and his arms shot out to the west.

No need of speech, though words crossed his lips, unheard, unheeded in that fresh marvel. For, full on the crest of the western hill, the illuminated shape of Sitting Bull had risen into view.

Although still within easy range of those marveling Indians, this point was fully quarter of a mile, as one would have to pick a toilsome way along that broken, rocky range, from the spot where the vision had first shown itself. Yet it was the same, down to the slightest detail.

Is it any marvel that the poor Sioux should be still further convinced that Sitting Bull was more powerful dead, than he had ever been in life? For barely twenty seconds had elapsed since that light died out, to reappear so far away.

Once again the vision went through that fierce, war-breeding pantomime. Once more it killed, scalped, and triumphed over a victim. And for the second time that deep, resonant voice urged the Sioux to break through the line of soldiers which was being drawn about them, to gain the Bad Lands, where a glorious victory awaited them, the end of which would be the perfect fulfillment of the Indian Messiah's prediction: America for the red-men alone!

Then, as before, that weird vision faded from sight, only to almost instantly reappear, this time on the southern hill-top, directly opposite the point where it had first greeted their eyes. And here, as at the other places, that grim play was repeated, with hardly a variation.

The Indians surged in that direction, a crazed, furious, ravening, yet bewildered mass of poor humanity. They acted in concert, yet each unit felt that he was alone. It was a terrible power thus exercised, and only superstition could have yielded such blind obedience.

For the third time the vision disappeared from those aching eyes, and as one man the Sioux turned toward the east, for instinct told them the circuit would be completed ere the end. And many among them would, if put on honor, have sworn their eyes could trace that vision flitting like an illuminated shadow over the broken hills, those mighty strides but touching the highest rocks, its speed rivaling that of the fiery lightning when the black thunder-cloud is rent as the storm bursts.

For the fourth time that illuminated figure came into view of all those eyes, and for the fourth time that grim pantomime was performed with war-club and scalping-knife. And for the fourth time the voice of Sitting Bull came floating downward to those hungry ears, now as from the first, speaking the Sioux language:

"The hour has struck, children of the Cut-throat! The charm is finished, the medicine made, and it is very good! Ye have waited long for the coming of the Messiah, but while Sitting Bull was clothed in the flesh, he could only preach, only point out the right trail; he could not show the way to his blind children. But now—yonder lies the land of promise! In the Bad Lands the fight must be fought, the victory won, our emancipation earned! Press forward, children of the Cut-throat! Though he may not show himself to your eyes in the sunlight, Sitting Bull will ever lead the way, and before his laugh the Blue Coats shall be as harmless weeds! Before his breath their bullets shall turn aside and do no harm to the red-man! Their long knives shall crumble like dry dirt before his war-club! Their—"

That sentence was never finished.

Even as the Sioux listened with hungry ears to those fiercely-welcome words, a sharp report, as of rifle or of revolver, broke the sequence, followed with barely an interval by a second shot. And, flinging up his arms, dropping war-club and medicine-staff from unnerved fingers, the ghost of Sitting Bull turned part way around, then pitched forward upon its face!

The body lay, a blurred spot of phosphorescent glow, on the top of the rock for a single second—barely long enough for those stupefied savages to note the fact—then it fell over to the further side, vanishing from their amazed sight.

For half a minute—ages under such circumstances—the Sioux stood spellbound, staring at the now gloomy point of rocks. They were unable to divine what had happened, despite those shots, that hideously realistic representation of

a mortal suddenly stricken by the hand of remorseless death.

Was not Sitting Bull a spirit? Was he not the long-looked-for Indian Messiah? Was he not immortal now? And yet—

Silverblade broke that awed silence with a choking, hysterical cry as he started forward, only to stumble and fall like one death-smitten.

Fortunately he was standing near one edge of the crowd, else he would have fared poorly in the mad rush that followed. In a solid mass at first, but then opening out as those less hampered gained ground, the intensely wrought-up Sioux rushed straight for that point of rocks, eager to learn what that strange closing scene really portended.

Up the hill they climbed, more like mad than sane men. More than one warrior was overthrown and trampled upon, forming a step to aid others in scaling those rocks. And then—Thunder Strike recoiled with a choking cry of wondering grief and terror as he first gained the crest of that rocky hill.

For there lay a dimly-glowing mass: little flames of bluish fire that seemed more like illuminated smoke, curling, flickering, writhing over breast, limbs, face—but not skull!

There the cruel scalping-knife had wrought its horrid work!

And this was what the eyes of Silverblade beheld when he came swiftly up and over the hill: a vision that gave him a far greater shock than any he had received before.

Then, he had believed with perfect faith. Now—

With a harsh, gasping sound rising in his throat, the half-blood rallied, to spring past the cowering figure of Thunder Strike, to drop on his knees at the side of that dimly glowing shape. To thrust out a hand toward that bosom, seemingly bare, yet clothed in a closely-fitting shirt, as his eyes now told him. To jerk his hand back, but not through fear of being burnt by those writhing flames.

Because he saw that shirt, through which red blood was forcing its way, showing where the surely-sent lead had torn a double passage. Because that blood told him life *had* been, though life was not!

"Look!" gasped Thunder Strike, a trembling finger pointing to the cast-aside wig, then at the short-cropped scalp, which partly covered the face of the prostrate figure. "Two scalps!"

As though those words broke the horrid spell which was numbing him, soul and body, Silverblade reached out his hands and tore that painted shirt open—rent it wide, laying bare the bullet-marked bosom! And more! Where the blood had not spread, the white skin showed all too clearly for further doubt. And staggering to his feet, the Shoshone reeled away, to sink in a shivering, moaning, miserable heap!

CHAPTER XI.

A SICK HEART AND TORTURED BRAIN.

By this time the hill-crest was covered with Indians, all eager to see, but very few inclined to touch, once they caught a glimpse of that partly unmasked figure, covered with fire which gave forth no heat and refused to scorch even while it flamed.

Those nearest the corpse when Silverblade reeled back and away, increased rather than lessened their distance, as though they felt the suffering Shoshone was being punished for having touched that shape.

And yet—surely, not even after the death bullets had drained his veins of blood, had the skin of Sitting Bull turned so purely white as this? Was it because spirit life had blanched his skin? Still, he who rose from death to lead his people on to victory, to life eternal, ought to show all red without, even as he was all red within!

Something like this whirled through the dizzy brain of Thunder Strike as he shrunk from, yet was drawn toward, that gruesome thing. A nameless dread urged him to flee, but something equally strong held him bound by a spell.

A little gust of wind came whirling along the ridge, and those tiny tongues of smoke-like flame ran along the body, to quiver under its lee for a moment. It was much as though a dark blanket was shutting down over the corpse, and hardly knowing what words passed his lips, Thunder Strike called aloud on his braves to gather material for a fire.

He was promptly obeyed. Action of any sort was better than staring at that enigma, and in a very short space of time the surrounding gloom began to fall back before that ruddy glow. And at the same time those unearthly flames began to desert the body lying there with its misplaced scalp and bullet-pierced bosom.

With them fled much of that superstitious awe, and Thunder Strike drew nearer the corpse. It called for nerve to touch that object, but he knew the eyes of his braves were upon him, and he forced his right forward until—that gory scalp was plucked from the face it had partly covered from inspection.

The glow of the fire revealed the symbols ever worn by Sitting Bull while directing the ghost-dance: crimson crosses on each cheek, crescents drawn with blue paint on forehead and chin, the background being as black as night. But it revealed still more: the face of another than the high priest of the Unkpapas!

"It is not Sitting Bull!" cried Thunder Strike, taking one keen look, then shrinking back in doubled amazement.

His words were echoed by a score of tongues, and hearing the united cry, Silverblade rallied with an effort, crawling toward the body, bent on fully satisfying his terrible doubts.

He crouched close beside that ghastly shape, and after gazing long and intently into that blood-smear face, he once more caught firm hold of the painted ghost-shirt, tearing it apart, exposing so much of the body that there was no longer room for doubt.

It was not Sitting Bull, for he was red. It was a white man. And having made this point clear, Silverblade once more staggered back, to support himself against a friendly rock.

That brief silence was broken by a cry of relieved joy, and one of the Sioux sprang to the corpse, lifting his moccasined foot and planting it on that bare breast, his voice rising shrilly:

"See, brothers! We were all fools, all blind! This is the lying fox we saw our father kill and scalp! Sitting Bull did not fall—did not die! Death comes but once to even a chief, and Sitting Bull has gone to throw dust in the eyes of the soldiers!"

The relieved Sioux were beginning to take up that joyous cry, but held their peace as Thunder Strike lifted a hand with a commanding gesture. Then, in forced calmness he spoke aloud:

"We all saw. We all heard. There were two shots. Could even Sitting Bull shoot an enemy out of a medicine-staff, or with a war-club?"

"Does Thunder Strike say that this is the Sitting Bull our eyes saw?" almost fiercely demanded the other Sioux.

"Thunder Strike does not say: if he could, his heart would be much lighter than it is now. All he knows is this: a pale-face lies dead at his feet, killed with bullets."

"And who killed that pale-face, if not Sitting Bull?"

"Running Bear, the Ogalallah!" cried the old chief, stooping and picking up the wig of horse-hair, to which was attached a grimy bit of paper, on which was drawn a rude representation of a bear in motion. "See! he left his totem, that all might know whose knife lifted this scalp!"

Once more all was confusion, but the "totem" was recognized by the nearer Sioux, and amid other cries came the words:

"If Mato Lusa has been here, why not Pa-he-has-ka, too?"

Instant silence fell over the gathering, and more than one scarred warrior instinctively made his form smaller while flashing keen, apprehensive looks around, ready to leap for the nearest cover should the noted "Long Hair" reveal himself.

All knew that Running Bear had been one of the Ogalallah Sioux taken to England by Buffalo Bill, with his Wild West show, and some of them had seen him at the Agency before the fall of Sitting Bull. If he had not joined the Indian police, might he not be working under direct orders from the great scout? Might it not even be that Long Hair had once more taken the war-path?

Finding that totem, so boldly left behind by the one it represented, added to that startled query, greatly helped to scatter those superstitious fears and doubts, and for the moment put aside the question of whether or no this dead man could have been what they accepted as the ghost of Sitting Bull; but Silverblade took no part in the search for a trail which followed.

Sick at heart, tortured almost beyond endurance by hideous doubts and fears, the young Shoshone moved away from the scene of death, with slow, uncertain steps.

This blow had fallen upon him with stunning force. It would have been severe enough at any time, but coming just when his religious fever was at its height, the reaction it caused was beyond description.

He could not have suffered sharper pangs had

those shots torn a passage through his own body; for when he saw that ghost-like vision suddenly changed to death-reality, a portion of the terrible truth flashed across his brain, and turned his fervent heart sick to its very core.

He had fought against that revelation with all his power, even while he knew that the truth had come to him, swift and sure as death had come to yonder masquerading figure. And he was fighting still as he groped his blinding way down that rugged slope, neither knowing nor caring whether his steps were leading him, only conscious of the one fact: he must fight back those hideous doubts, or go mad!

Was it all a fraud? Had he been led so far astray by lies, instead of guided by truth? Was there no faith to be placed in even the New Messiah? Was he, too, but a devil masquerading as a saint?

After the first shock of surprise and disappointment had passed away, Silverblade had accepted this illuminated vision for what it seemed, for what all those red-men believed: the resurrected high priest, risen to lead his heavily burdened children to the promised land.

It was a miracle, but no more than had been prophesied, time and again, by those who saw and spoke to the Great Spirit in the trance his gracious power produced. From the very first they had been advised to flock to the standard raised by Sitting Bull. He was the chosen representative of the New Messiah, in the flesh. What, then, so incredible in finding him the Messiah himself, now that his mortal body had died, leaving his soul at liberty?

So it was made clear to Silverblade, and never another in all that host more firmly believed in that vision, up to the moment when those death-shots rung forth, cutting that impassioned speech short, and laying the seeming Messiah low in the last sleep which comes only to mortals.

But now?

"Was that other vision a lie?" huskily gasped the tortured youth, pausing as he reached the level, clasping his throbbing temples with both hands. "Was that, too, only a hideous fraud? Have I been tricked by malicious devils from the very first?"

The bare thought was more bitter than death, and with a choking groan, the half blood staggered forward, only saved from falling by the act of walking. It was purely instinct that led him in the direction of the camp, for just then his eyes saw nothing, his ears heard naught; he was blind, deaf and dumb to all save those horrible doubts.

He came almost in contact with an advancing yet shrinking figure, but he knew it not, until the faint, pleading voice of Little Bird came through the gloom, and a trembling hand touched his arm:

"Silverblade—brother?"

The youth paused, staring stupidly at that shadowy form, and Little Bird took courage from his apparent attention, adding rapidly and in more natural tones:

"Little Bird has been seeking her—her brother," with a brief catch in her voice before that title could be spoken. "She wanted to warn him of danger, while he walks the night, for Red Leaf—"

A low, snarling cry escaped the Shoshone.

"That demon! Red Leaf led me to worse than death! Red Leaf—"

His hands shot out and closed upon that shrinking, frightened form. He jerked Little Bird close to him, staring wildly into her face for a single breath, then flung her rudely aside as a sound—real or fancied—came to his ears from behind.

He snatched a knife from his girdle as he sprang swiftly in that direction, his eyes roving fiercely around in quest of his prey; for in those mad moments his sole wish was to meet and slay the false prophet who had so horribly led him astray.

It was but the madness of a moment. There was no enemy before him, and once more Silverblade fell a prey to his hideous doubts.

He staggered onward a short distance, but then his steps grew slower, to finally cease. He stood with bowed head, with empty hands. The knife had fallen from his nerveless fingers when he knew he had only his wavering faith to do battle with.

His belief was his life! To lose that, would be bidding adieu to all hope, all light, all future content. He could not doubt—and so assuring himself, he doubted still the more.

It was an hour to turn black hair gray, to make an aged man of a recently ardent youth. And if he had been among the vilest sinners this earth was ever cursed with, that hour would

have gone far toward making expiation for Silverblade, son of Weenamoo.

He clinched his teeth, his hands, fighting it out in deadly silence. He was lost to all else but his awful torments. He had forgotten the Sioux, nor did he hear them as they came down the hill on their return to camp. He had forgotten poor Little Bird and her broken warning of impending danger. He could only give thought to that terrible shock, received when the false spirit went down in death before those shots.

He never knew that evil eyes had sought for and singled him out from the dim shadows cast by the scattered evergreens. He never heard those catlike footfalls as a crouching shape stole, foot by foot, then inch by inch, nearer and nearer to his back. He never knew that a red reflection was sent shimmering through one of those pines, as a bared blade caught the glow of yonder freshened camp-fire.

But such were the facts, and with a devilish triumph already sparkling in his greenish-gray eyes, Zeno Godfrey lifted his armed hand and gathered his muscles for the leap which was to forever end the young life he had so remorselessly shadowed during the few months past.

He had not dared join the deluded Sioux, after being spied upon by Little Bird and the half-blood, because he did not know how much they might have discovered of his treachery. And after witnessing the fall in death of one of his confederates, he knew that discovery must surely follow investigation, and he lingered only in fierce hopes of killing the youth he had ever hated, but had spared that he might make him subserve his crafty ends.

Now—his time had come, at last!

With a snarl as vicious as it was low, Godfrey leaped forward to bury his long blade in that bowed back: but as he made his leap, a dark form darted between the two men, with a shrill, far-reaching cry.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BORDER BEAGLE'S BIG HAUL.

It was Mato Lusa's keen eye that glanced through those double-sights, clearly visible with that phosphorescent glow twining about his target, and it was the unerring aim of Running Bear, the Ogalallah, that laid the living ghost low in death.

With a low, fierce chuckle the Indian scout sprung forward as the figure of light dropped to the rock which covered his slayer from view of those marveling yet believing eyes on the level below. He caught one of those quivering hands, and jerked the body from the rock, then tore off the wig of woven horse-hair, to give his ruthless knife free play. He dropped the gory scalp on that upturned face, then fastened his totem to the wig, chuckling again as he left this message for such eyes as might seek to read its meaning.

The wild outburst from the plain warned him to flight, and springing from rock to rock so that as slight a trail as possible might be left behind, he was quickly under cover, where his progress might be more leisurely.

"Sitting Bull twice dead, now!" he muttered to himself, with a repetition of that grim chuckle, picking his way rapidly yet noiselessly through that difficult bit of ground, casting occasional glances backward. "Running Bear wish he might wait to see, but don't he know? And his ears will catch their howls when they find that even a ghost-shirt can't stop death from finding a heart!"

He was reluctant to flee beyond eye-range, but he knew that there was one awaiting his coming whose anger would be red-hot, as it was. And even he, with all his recklessness, did not dare go too far.

It did not take long for the active Sioux to reach the point he was aiming for: a snug covert among the rocks and pines, not far from the spot where the imitation ghost of Sitting Bull had made its first appearance; and here he was sternly greeted by Big Horn Buck, the Border Beagle.

"You fired those shots, Running Bear?"

"Me shoot—me kill, too!" half-sulkily replied the savage, but giving his rifle a shake of fierce triumph as he flashed a look into those other faces: all red, like his own, save that of the detective.

For a single breath the odds were even that Running Bear would have to pay the penalty due his recent transgression; but then Horton choked back his anger, coldly speaking:

"Why did you kill, when I said capture?"

"No time fo' ketch. Heap Injun come up hill—mad fo' go 'way to Bad Lands. Dat why me kill. Now dey know fools. Now dey don't know what do next. Dat why, Big Horn."

The Border Beagle made no immediate reply.

He could fully appreciate the defense offered by Running Bear, from a savage standpoint. He knew that, even had that seeming spirit vanished before their mad rush, it would be long odds in favor of the band under Thunder Strike making an immediate push for the Bad Lands, even though they had to cut a way through the cordon of soldiers. Now, they surely must discover how thoroughly they had been befooled, and that fact might make them doubt even the truth of the much-talked-of Indian Messiah.

Big Horn had carefully laid his plans to capture the entire band of Ghost-makers, and this sanguinary act might seriously endanger his cherished hopes. Still, he knew that the deed of Running Bear would almost certainly save lives in the end, and that reflection helped him keep a check on his anger.

"You are like a soldier, now, Running Bear. Your agent placed you under my command. You had no right to shoot, when I said not. I am very angry with you, but—this is no time to punish your disobedience.

"There is work for us all to do. Come! I have given you your orders. Follow them, to the letter, for I'll kill the first who dares step over the line I have marked out!"

Keeping well under cover, Big Horn Buck led the way to the pile of rocks in front of which Zeno Godfrey had paused to give his signal, after being warned of peril by the false ghost. And, crouching low for a little, Big Horn once more whispered his orders to those eager Sioux.

Then, moving ahead a few paces, he sent forth a low, tremulous whistle, to which a speedy answer was given. Then the rock swung aside, and a husky voice muttered quickly:

"Who is it?"

"I—Godfrey," answered the detective, pressing in through the opening, to add in that stolen voice:

"Rest come in, yet?"

"Not yet, but—"

That was all. Two sinewy hands closed about his throat in the darkness, and as Big Horn forced his prey backward, he sent a low call over his shoulder, which brought his Indians swiftly to the entrance.

"Come in. Leave the rock open. Capture any one who comes, if I'm not back in time," he swiftly said, then bade Running Bear follow, he half-dragged, half-pushed his nearly senseless prisoner through the passage until the blanket-screen was passed and the cavern proper gained.

He cast one keen glance into the swollen face of his captive, and despite that fact, together with the mask of paint which covered it over, he recognized those features.

"Horace Perkins! I reckoned as much, when I heard your sweet voice singing out, pardner!" with a short, grim laugh.

"Nodder ghost, eh?" chuckled Running Bear, licking his thick lips as he mechanically fingered his knife. "Bes' mek 'um sure-pop ghost!"

"Harm him, and I'll make a ghost out of you!" sternly growled Big Horn, producing thongs from his pocket with which to securely bind and gag his prisoner. "You will guard him, Bear. If he dies, I'll kill you."

But Big Horn Buck valued his prize too highly to leave him alone with the sanguinary Ogalallah, now that he had tasted blood. He was forced to leave the cave, but he was not long in instructing the Indians whom he found in the passage, and sending all save one back to play their parts in the cavern.

He alone knew how to work the rock-door, and he alone could hope to deceive those whom he expected to entrap ere long. He knew that there were three others of the ghost-making gang, without counting the dead member, or Zeno Godfrey. He knew that they must have seen something had gone wrong with the programme, and he naturally looked for a hasty rallying at this rendezvous.

"They may come in a bunch, though I hope they'll drop in singly," he explained before sending his braves back to the lighted space. "If they come more than one at a time, I'll pass them along, and you must attend to them as they enter the cave. Take them alive, and unhurt, or I swear I'll kill the ones who break orders!"

Big Horn retained one of the Sioux to assist him in case a second Ghost-maker should come up while he was mastering an earlier arrival, but as fortune decided, this emergency did not arise.

He had scarcely given his orders, when a hurried, imperfect signal came from below the rocky point, and as Big Horn answered it, one of the gang came hurriedly through the opening, spluttering:

"Deuce to pay, Perk! Link shot, and—"

"You trapped!" gratingly muttered Big Horn,

as his muscular fingers gripped that throbbing throat. "Watch for the next, Injun!"

Despite the struggles of the athletic Ghost-maker, Big Horn dragged him back to the cave, where he ordered the Indians to bind and gag him, then hurried back to his post near the almost closed opening.

There was a longer wait before the next move, but at length the signal was given, and as he peered forth, Big Horn Buck caught sight of at least two dim shadows, and whispering to his assistant to go back and warn his mates, he sent forth the answering note.

He did not swing the rock fairly aside until that brief flash of light, as the blanket-screen opened and closed, had vanished; but as the pivoted rock swung aside, and only two men stooped to enter, he asked:

"Where's Godfrey?"

"Deuce knows—I don't! Who's come in?"

"With you, all but Link."

"And his past coming—on his own hoofs!" growled the fellow, crowding past the one whom he mistook for Perkins. "Some devil shot poor Seymore and we've got to skin out o' this in a holy hurry!"

"Go on—tell me all when—if Godfrey comes, let him signal," mumbled Big Horn Buck, closing the opening so that but a crack remained to prevent its locking, then pressing hard upon the heels of the two frightened Ghost-makers.

They flung open the blanket-screen, and were fairly inside the cave before a suspicion of peril came to them: and then it was too late even to offer fight. One went down before Big Horn, and half a dozen red-shins covered his mate out of sight, half-smothering him before they put his limbs in bonds.

Then, rising to his feet, the Border Beagle gave a low, grim chuckle of intense satisfaction as he summed up the big haul he had made. And surely he had cause for self-gratulation.

There was but one drawback: the killing of Link Seymore. For, he hardly felt a doubt but that, as soon as practicable, Zeno Godfrey would hasten to join his fellow-schemers, when the round-up would be complete. It had taken time and many privations, to say nothing of the peril encountered before that point was gained: still, the game was richly worth all it had cost, so far.

Knowing that Godfrey would pause to give the signal before attempting to enter, Big Horn Buck felt no uneasiness in leaving the entrance unguarded for a few moments. He hoped to gain some information from his first captive, and drawing a knife to cut the thongs that held the gag in place, he stooped over Horace Perkins, saying:

"I'm going to free your jaws, pardner, but if you try to cry out, I'll make a still wider mouth right below your chin! Fair warning, Horace Perkins! And now—out comes the stopper!"

Retaining the gag for further use in case of need, Big Horn Buck squatted down beside the bound Ghost-maker, speaking deliberately:

"Of course it would be wasting breath to tell you that we've dropped to your little game, Perkins, so I'll pass over all that. Now, when do you look for Zeno Godfrey back here?"

As he asked that question, Big Horn toyed with his knife in a significant manner, which was sufficient to unlock those lips, had their owner been even worse frightened.

"Never!" huskily muttered the knave, shrinking as far as his bonds would permit. "I reckon he's gone—wish I'd been as wise!"

"I asked for truth, not lies, please bear in mind," with ominous politeness. "How do you signal Red Leaf when he's wanted in here?"

"It's no use, I swear, Big Horn! He said he was off, as soon as he'd killed Silverblade, the—"

Big Horn Buck sprung to his feet with a savage snarl, crying out:

"If he's harmed my boy, I'll kill him like a dog! And I'll turn you all over to the Sioux for a general roast—I swear it, by Heaven!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END OF A CROOKED TRAIL.

His painful brooding broken by that shrill scream, Silverblade mechanically sprung ahead, then wheeled with hand gripping the weapons at his waist, to catch an indistinct glimpse of two figures apparently locked in a death-grapple.

Only a glimpse, for even as he looked, the shorter, slighter figure was cast aside by its antagonist, and at the same instant there came the panting warning:

"Red Leaf kill—Little Bird tried—"

The Sioux maid struck the frozen ground, her warning incomplete, but Red Leaf supplied what was lacking. With blade reddened by that

intercepted stroke, he dashed upon Silverblade, snarling wolfishly, knowing that his dastardly work must be wrought right speedily, if at all. For, not content with her first wild cry, Little Bird was lifting her voice again, sounding the alarm so familiar to ears of the Sioux braves.

To any other foe, Silverblade might have fallen an easy victim, just then, thanks to the terrible shock he had so recently received; but never to Red Leaf, whose lying tongue had led him so far astray.

"Devil! I'll eat your heart! I'll drink your blood!"

Godfrey struck viciously as he made his leap, but his wrist fell into the lifting hand of the half-blood, and the stroke was foiled, if not entirely checked. Red Leaf's hand was swept aside at an angle, and then his arm was checked, despite his fiercest efforts to drive that keen blade home, through the ribs of his youthful adversary.

He tried to jerk away, but those slender fingers had a grip of steel. He thought to snatch forth and use with his left hand a pistol, but in that, as well, he was foiled. For Silverblade, all fire and fury now that he felt his betrayer had come to find his own punishment, closed in and pressed the fight, paying no heed to the excited yells which were even then coming from the Sioux encampment.

Until this moment Zeno Godfrey had held Silverblade in contempt, as but an overgrown child. He would have scorned himself had reason warned him he would find in that stripling a foe, man well worthy his steel. But now—his eyes were quickly opened to the truth.

There was a desperate struggle for not more than a dozen seconds. Then the two men went down—with Red Leaf underneath!

A short, snarling sound escaped his lips as he struck the earth, but the next instant his tense muscles relaxed, and he lay like one killed in the very act of falling.

Although he had so proudly, so defiantly declared himself a hostile, Silverblade was but a novice in the art of hand-to-hand fighting. Then, too, his white blood carried a certain degree of chivalry with it. And so, with a curious mixture of fierce joy, awe, doubt, the half-blood slackened his grip, then drew back, as though to give his adversary an opportunity to regain his footing and renew the fight.

But Zeno Godfrey lay just as he had fallen, his only motion being a convulsive shivering of the head and shoulders, his only sound a low, rasping breath, which might mean whispered curses for his slayer.

Before Silverblade had fairly regained his feet, Little Bird was at his side, asking incoherent questions, mingled with panting sobs over which she had no longer control.

And then, several bearing brands snatched from the nearest fire, the alarmed Sioux came rushing up, to be greeted by the fallen prophet with a husky cry, then the fierce charge:

"Kill him! Kill Silverblade! He stabbed your priest—in the back! See, where—"

With what appeared to be an expiring effort, the false prophet turned himself over, and there—he was right, so far; from his back protruded the silver-mounted hilt of a knife, the blade of which was hidden in the quivering flesh!

Silverblade started back with a low ejaculation, his already disordered wits still further bewildered by that vicious charge of assassination. Even Thunder Strike, who was among the foremost to reach the spot, seemed horror-stricken at the bare suspicion of such a deed.

"He lies! Red Leaf lies!" panted Little Bird, now standing between those angered braves and the youth whose life she had for the second time preserved. "He tried to kill the Shoshone, but Little Bird—see!" and one hand laid bare the ugly gash marking her plump shoulder. "This is where Red Leaf struck first!"

"She lies!" snarled Godfrey, vainly striving to rise, then foiled again as he strove to turn over. "I caught them—he was making a fool of her, when I—"

"Stop!" harshly thundered the Brule chieftain, springing forward, one arm clasping his child to his side, the other waving back his excited braves. "There is a right way, but so is there another that is all wrong. Red Leaf, prophet of the Messiah! If you have been wronged by another, even though that other is of my blood, you shall—"

"Kill—curse—ah-h-h!"

One swift shudder that seemed to convulse the upper portion of his body, yet to leave his lower limbs motionless as though they had been sealed by the finger of death, then Zeno Godfrey lay still.

At a sign from Thunder Strike, several braves

grasped and disarmed the son of Weenamoo. Silverblade made no resistance. That black shadow was coming back over heart and brain, and he found little value in life.

Other braves lifted the limp, nerveless form of the prophet, bearing it across to the nearest fire, where their most skillful doctor was summoned. He came quickly, but before his arrival, a startling discovery had been made.

The knife buried to its hilt in the back of Red Leaf, was his own!

No one could explain just how it had happened, and Silverblade, least of all. When he came to be questioned—which was not until afterward—all he could say was that he had caught that armed hand as it came for his heart; that he had closed in with Red Leaf, and a fall took place, after a brief struggle.

He had never touched the weapon itself, never struck a blow at his assailant. And so declaring, he left them to draw their own conclusions; that, in some manner, Red Leaf's armed hand had been twisted around behind him, or else that he had instinctively flung it back to break the shock when he found himself falling underneath.

After all, it was little matter now how the prophet received his hurt, in the face of the fact that his time had come. For, after a careful examination by their wisest medicine-man, Red Leaf was pronounced hurt unto death.

His spine had received serious injury, benumbing his lower limbs, and death was creeping inch by inch toward his heart.

There was an awful scene when Zeno Godfrey first heard this verdict. He would not believe himself a dying man. He would cheat them all! He would live to see Silverblade dead and—

But as that awful numbness made itself felt, even through his mad rage, there came with it another change. And then, when he knew that his hours, his minutes, even, were surely numbered, the false prophet recklessly tore away the cunning mask he had worn so long, revealing himself as he actually was, as those simple red-men had believed.

"I am white—all white!" he huskily panted, his eyes glowing with the greenish luster which marks a frightened cat. "I have done all I knew how to wipe out your thrice-cursed race! If I had been given life long enough, every red-skinned devil in America would have died the death of dogs!"

There were brief intervals during which his awful passion seemed to die away, as through bodily exhaustion, and it was during one of these that Zeno Godfrey begged for Silverblade, the Shoshone, to come before him.

"Say that I am dying," he faintly whispered. "Say that I cannot take up the last trail without—*Fetch! I must see the boy!*"

The son of Weenamoo came in response to that urgent message, but those lids were closed, and Zeno Godfrey lay like a corpse. The band of death had imprinted its sign on that painted face. Those deep lines could not be mistaken. Wab-pa-doo-tah had run his last course!

"Wait," faintly murmured Godfrey, as Silverblade was turning away, thinking death had forestalled his coming. "I want—lower—come nearer, so I—whisper, for you must—know—"

Silverblade silently sunk upon his knees by the side of the man who had done so much to blight his youth. He knew much of this, now, although no open confession had been made. And yet—he could not hate his enemy, now that he lay such an utter wreck as this!

"Lower—come closer!" panted Godfrey, his voice so weak as to strongly contrast with that fierce fire which leaped into his eyes.

Then, the hand which had been hidden in the folds of his blanket, jerked forth a cocked revolver, thrusting the muzzle directly against that honest breast, while his left hand flew up to grip Silverblade by the throat!

So sudden was it all, that the half-blood was completely helpless, and though a score of active Sioux were standing around, watching and listening, all was over before a hand could be lifted to check that murderous effort.

Over—but not as Zeno Godfrey had hoped, had wickedly prayed!

The pointed hammer fell, striking the primer fairly, but only a dull click followed. Godfrey had used the weapon for years, and with it that same make of cartridges. In all that time he had never met with a miss-fire until just now!

Silverblade wrested the weapon away before another attempt at murder could be made, springing back and to his feet as he did so. And then, driven frantic with rage at seeing his last devilish scheme frustrated, Zeno Godfrey let his tongue loose, pouring forth a flood of curses, and mingling with them words which cast light

on more than one dark place in Silverblade's mind.

"I hated you from the very first, David Woodbridge! I had to fight against the temptation to slit your throat, even while I was speaking most lovingly into your fool ear! But I wanted your inheritance, and I saw only one sure method of gaining it: I would drive you into the ranks of the hostiles, and then—I was a fool, but I thought I was very wise—then!"

He concealed nothing, now. He told how he had been one among many others hired to spread the ghost-dance craze. He told how he had helped convert Silverblade, by a false Messiah. And then, speaking truth even amidst his wildest ravings, he told how, as a final resort, those paid emissaries had concocted the trick of Sitting Bull's ghost.

Awed, bewildered, Thunder Strike and the other chiefs present listened to these astounding revelations, too nearly spellbound to think of forcing a still more valuable confession before it should be too late. Then, when such an effort was made, it failed, for Zeno Godfrey had worn himself out by that fierce outburst of unholly rage.

As the sun reached a point overhead, the end came: horrible as had been the entire scene, its termination was still worse.

CHAPTER XIV.

FIGHTING AGAINST CONVICTION.

If that death had robbed him of his dearest friend: if yonder grim corpse had been the revered ashes of his mother, father or sister: the young Shoshone could hardly have received a greater shock.

For hours he sat apart from all others, his arms clasping his knees, and his head bowed in the hollow thus formed, all covered over with the blanket he wore, thinking, brooding, heart-sick and brain-weary.

He had abandoned father and sister, sustained only by the sympathy of his Indian mother, to follow—what?

Was it all a hideous lie? Was there no truth in this world? Were all things evil, all things vile, all full of mocking treachery? Was there no hope for his long-suffering people? Was there not even a Messiah?

That doubt was the bitterest of all! He could have borne up under everything else, if that faith—only a short day ago so strong, so perfect, so full of solemn joy in the assurance that the day of redemption was close at hand—had only been left him!

For it had been wrested away, despite his recent vows to cling to his faith. He would not doubt, yet he could not help doubting. He would retain all his former belief, but even as he told himself this, Silverblade felt his belief slowly but surely slipping away, to give place to those doubts, worse than death, which Zeno Godfrey had left him with his dying curses.

The Shoshone never knew how those hours crept past, save by the scars they left on his heart; deeper, more lasting even than the lines they drew upon his face, blacker than the shadows their fingers painted beneath his haggard, sunken eyes.

He never knew when, after due consultation among the chiefs, the corpse of Zeno Godfrey—no longer known as Wab-pa-doo-tah, the elect of the New Messiah—was dragged across the inclosed valley, to be stripped of its medicine-garb, to be robbed of its symbolical paint, to be left naked as when it came into the world, to be exposed on those bare rocks, for the hungry wolves or foul buzzards to feast upon.

It was the doom befitting such a traitor; and gravely, sternly, silently that doom was carried out by the Sioux whom he had so long cheated.

Silverblade never knew how often Little Bird, her flesh wound dressed, but her aching heart wounded even more deeply by the sight of that inconsolable despair, passed slowly before him, longing yet fearing to drop a word of comfort in his ears.

He never understood if he heard Thunder Strike asking him to join in the council which was about to convene. And after twice speaking without receiving an answer, the old warrior withdrew, to report that the finger of the Great Spirit was resting on the brain of the Snake-child.

It could hardly be said that he knew what he was doing when, near dusk, Silverblade rose from where he had passed so many hours, moving stiffly, painfully, like one weighed down with the infirmities of old age. He did not know that he was moving toward the hills where the night before, the false ghost of Sitting Bull had been changed to the real ghost of Link Seymore. All he knew was that he must do something, find

something, to kill that hideous torture which was slowly eating his heart out.

"Davie, lad!"

Silverblade gave a short, gasping cry as that sound came to his ear. His bent form straightened up. His hands rose to clasp his head, then brushed almost fiercely across his eyes, like one tearing away a veil that smothered even while blinding.

"Davie, boy-pard!"

Silverblade reeled, and would have fallen among the rocks, only for the strong arm that lent him such timely support. And, half-laughing, half sobbing, Big Horn Buck, moved as he never remembered having been moved before, hugged that shivering, unnerved form to his broad bosom, murmuring words of consolation and of cheer.

"I know it all, Davie, lad! I was down yonder last night—I went to save your life or lose my own by your side! I know how you must have suffered, learning the truth like this, but—"

With a desperate effort the half-blood rallied, slipping out of those arms before Horton divined his purpose, hoarsely panting:

"Davie is dead! I am Silverblade—I am red—all red!"

For a single breath the Border Beagle was taken all aback, but then he rallied. He felt that now or never was his chance. If they parted again, as they parted before, with that insane delusion still alive in that heart and brain, he knew that death alone could work a cure.

"You were never more than half red, David Woodbridge, and God's own truth is turning that half pure white, if you'll only let it work! I've been looking for you, all day. Now you've come, I mean to hold you fast until your eyes are fairly opened!"

Swift as thought the Shoshone drew his knife, his hand rising for the stroke. It might have fallen in his madness, had Horton shrunk away, or touched a weapon with which to meet that assault. Instead, Big Horn tore open his shirt, baring his honest bosom, stepping forward as he sternly spoke:

"Send it home, David Woodbridge! Strike, then go tell yonder red-skins that you've proved your right to form one of the gang, by slaying your best, firmest friend!"

A brief pause, then that armed hand slowly sunk. And the half-blood huskily muttered:

"I can not—it's like striking—why do you bar my way, Big Horn?"

"Because that way leads to madness, if not to the gallows," came the stern yet sad retort. "Because I'm bound not to stand idly by and see you go blindly to ruin, David Woodbridge."

"I am—there was a David Woodbridge, but he is dead!"

"Not dead, but under a spell," came the swift retort. "And I'm going to break that spell, Davie, lad," a strong hand closing upon his arm. "I'm going to kill or cure, for you're a mighty sight worse than dead, this way! You'll come with me, Davie?"

"Where? What for? I don't—I can't understand what is the matter with my head!" huskily muttered the youth, first resisting, then yielding to that friendly force, moving further among the rocks. I am Silverblade—you are white—we ought to fight, but—"

"You'll have to do the fighting for all hands, then, Davie," laughed Horton, choking back his strong emotion as best he could.

He knew that the fanatic had received a painful shock when the double-dealing of Zeno Godfrey was exposed, but he had hardly looked for such utter prostration as this. Still, he would not doubt. He must fairly open those dazed eyes, and with truth would return strength.

Indeed, though it hardly showed itself on the surface, as yet, Silverblade had already gained strength of both body and brain by that meeting with his old-time friend. And as they wound along through the thick-lying rocks, each minute was doing its part toward reviving that stunned mechanism.

"What is this?" demanded Silverblade as, in response to a whistle from the lips of Big Horn, an opening made itself visible among a mass of rocks. "Where are you taking me, Big Horn?"

"Where I trust you'll find the right medicine for a diseased mind, Davie," said Horton, gently but firmly pressing the youth into that dark passage. "Surely, you're not afraid to trust your old friend?"

"Silverblade knows no fear," was the proud retort, giving Horton a disagreeable shock; it sounded too much like the fanatic of old!

He said nothing more until they both stood erect in that lighted retreat, but he keenly

watched the face of the half-blood as Silverblade took note of the surroundings.

Yonder lay the bound forms of Horace Perkins, Theron Clark, Pierre Crevier and Thomas Acton, the four surviving members of the Ghost-making Gang. And on the opposite side of the irregularly shaped chamber, squatted the figures of six Sioux warriors, smoking their pipes and half-maliciously watching the young Shoshone.

"These are my friends, and that makes them yours, as well," said Horton, motioning a hand toward the Indians, only to be prevented from adding more by Silverblade, who sternly said:

"They are not friends of mine. They are Friendlies. Silverblade is a hostile—he is all red!"

"Hoo!" grunted Running Bear, sending a stream of blue smoke toward the proud speaker. "I hear a coyote yelping!"

Big Horn Buck made a stern, even fierce gesture for silence, then turned Silverblade partly around, so that he squarely faced the captives.

"We'll settle terms with the Friendlies, lad, after a bit. They are my friends, and they ought to be yours, as well, but if you can't agree, I'll see that you don't fall to pulling hair. Now—these are the fellows who helped Zeno Godfrey fool many an older, if not wiser, man than you, Davie! These are the Ghost-makers of last night."

"They are dogs, and make the air stink with their breath," coldly said the half-blood, his eyes glittering with hidden hatred. "Why are they not cast out to poison the buzzards?"

"They deserve such a fate, no doubt, Davie, but we whites go to work after another fashion. Now—these very fellows helped Godfrey play the Messiah, when you thought you beheld the pure quill, out west, lad!"

"I hear, but I do not believe," was the dogged response.

"Tell him the plain truth, Perkins," nodded Horton. "Recall the very words you spoke when he questioned you, if you can. Don't fear. I'll go bail Davie don't harm you for speaking out the simple truth."

Though with evident reluctance, the Ghost-maker obeyed. He went into detail, and told such a straight story that, despite his firm resolve not to believe, Silverblade felt his faith still further shaken by that recital.

"Add all this to what Godfrey must have let drop in his madness before he died, Davie, and then tell me: can you still believe in this fabled Indian Messiah?"

"Silverblade has listened and he still has faith!" was the swift response. "Does one lie blot out all truth? Because one blind man slips on a smooth place, are all others to fall? If one man steals, are there none but thieves under the heavens? No! There is truth, honor, faith—and while Silverblade can draw a breath, just so long will he believe in the Coming Messiah!"

Big Horn Buck frowned involuntarily, for he had counted surely on this revelation winning the victory. For the moment he did not know what to do or say next, and before he could shape a fitting reply, Running Bear, the Ogalallah, spoke up harshly:

"If the Messiah is true, then his word about the holy coats must also be right. The fool who played Sitting Bull's ghost, last night, wore a ghost-shirt, but Running Bear's lead found his heart!"

CHAPTER XV.

TESTING THE GHOST SPIRIT.

SILVERBLADE flashed a look of scorn upon the savage, before replying to that taunt:

"The coat was a lie, even as the heart it covered was a fraud. If it had been blessed by the Indian Messiah, Running Bear never would have fired twice—even at its wearer's back!"

That taunt went home, for Mato Lusa started forward with hand on a pistol-butt as he snarled:

"You carry a holy coat, but—"

Big Horn sprung between the two men, and while one hand gripped Running Bear's right arm, preventing him from fairly drawing that weapon, with his other he made a gesture which even that turbulent brave could not misinterpret.

"Running Bear is like a fool that is drunk! If he must fight, Big Horn stands ready to show him who is chief, here. Back, and hide your face, Ogalallah! It does not look good in my eyes! It is not the face of the real Running Bear! Go, or Big Horn will kill the face-thief!"

That stern, deadly gaze, even more than the

words which the Border Beagle used, cowed the blustering savage, and he slowly shrunk back, to resume his former station with the other smokers.

As for them, they had watched and hearkened in stoical silence, but now they gave a simultaneous grunt of grim approval. Possibly they were themselves growing tired of Running Bear's "bumptiousness," since he had counted the first coup of the expedition.

Horton did not waste another thought on his bothersome follower, but turned to Silverblade, a bright light glowing in his eyes. He had been almost at the point of despairing, but now he saw another chance of opening those fanatical eyes to the simple truth.

This hint was given him, partly by the words Running Bear let drop in making that unfinished challenge, but more by the involuntary action of Silverblade himself: his left hand seeking a neatly-rolled bundle attached to his belt.

"It is the ghost shirt, Davie, lad?" he muttered, gently, touching the half-blood on the arm.

"It is the holy coat—yes," proudly bowed the Shoshone.

Big Horn Buck asked no further questions, just then. He had learned sufficient for the immediate present, and his active wits were deciding in what manner he could improve the chance he saw before him.

He had investigated the "ghost shirt," or "holy coat" matter, long since. He knew that this was one method by which Sitting Bull and other discontents among the Sioux tribes hoped to gain bold recruits to their dangerous doctrine. He who was invested with one of these marvelous garments, fashioned by the hand of the Messiah, decorated by the hand of his earthly representative, the high priest of the Unkpapas, might enter battle against the heaviest odds, without fear of being scathed by bullet or steel. If a shot was aimed at the wearer of the ghost-shirt, the battered lead would fly back to destroy him who sent it on such an impious mission! And so with steel: he who struck must suffer the full penalty!

"Silverblade, son of Weenamoo," said Big Horn, in the tongue of the Mother Snake. "Your ears have drank in the words passing the lips of this crushed lizard: do you still have faith in the Coming Messiah?"

"Silverblade has faith—without it, he would burn up with fever, and die like a poisoned dog!"

Big Horn broke into a low, easy laugh, slipping a hand through an arm of his boy-pard, leading him toward the blanket-screen.

"If that's the case, reckon I might as well save my wind, eh, Davie? But you'll not be too proud to take a little stroll with the fellow you used to call pard?"

Silverblade bowed his willingness, but there was a perplexed look upon his face as Horton led the way through the low passage and out under the brightly twinkling stars. He could not comprehend why Big Horn had so abruptly abandoned the hope which he had so earnestly, almost fiercely, displayed, but a few moments earlier.

Still, he made no remark, asked no question, following his old friend through the night unhesitatingly, though each step was carrying him further away from the camp of the Sioux, with whom he had cast his lot after the fall of Sitting Bull.

"Don't you think it, lad!" Horton suddenly said, as he paused, to confront the half-blood, answering those thoughts before they took shape in words. "I'm going to save you from yourself, if any one man can do it! I promised Little Sure Shot, your sister, I'd bring you back to her, safe and sound, honest and manly as you went away."

"Silverblade will go of his own accord, when the Messiah reigns!"

"There can be but one Messiah, and I'm praying to Him for power to save one of His straying lambs, David Woodbridge," said Horton, with solemn earnestness; but then, with an abrupt change of tone and manner, he added: "That's all right, Davie! I'm a man, you're another. I'm a bit older than you, and I've seen considerably more of the world and its trickeries. Still, I'm going to give you a perfectly square deal."

"You believe in the Indian Messiah. You carry the shirt his hands made. You believe that is all Sitting Bull swore, when it passed from his hand into yours?"

Silverblade bowed assent. Just then he hardly dared trust his tongue to make answer. This man was his friend, as far as any one of the proscribed blood could be. He would not quarrel with him, or with his impious unbelief. That was his misfortune not his crime.

"Good enough!" with an emphatic nod. "If that ghost shirt lies, then he who gave it to you also lied. If it is all that Sitting Bull swore, then I am the fool, and I solemnly swear to turn Indian, by adoption, and join Silverblade as a brother hostile!"

"You will do this, brother?" almost breathlessly asked the youth.

"I will do this, if, on your side, you as solemnly promise to abandon this craze, if I prove the ghost shirt a complete fraud. Here is my hand: dare you give me yours, Silverblade, to seal our compact?"

Without an instant's hesitation, the Shoshone gripped that hand with his own. And then Big Horn Buck knew his end was good as won!

"You are a man, Silverblade. I am another," he said, with grim earnestness as they both rose to their feet. "If I lose, I will turn red. If I win you will once more be David Woodbridge, all white?"

"No. The son of Weenamoo can never wash away his red blood, but he will no longer be Silverblade, the Hostile, but Silverblade, the Friendly. Is that enough, brother?"

Horton hesitated, but only for a moment. He might lose all by trying to gain too much. And, once those true eyes were opened to the utter falsity of the creed he had adopted, the cure must become complete.

"Is is good, and I agree," he bowed, gravely.

"Then the rest is simple," laughed Silverblade, casting aside his blanket and unrolling his painted holy coat, to slip on over his head. "Big Horn has both rifle and pistols. Here is the heart of Silverblade, son of the Messiah. Shoot!"

"We'll start a fire, first, Davie," laughed Horton, setting about the work as he spoke. "I can do rough shooting by starlight, but now—it's for more than simple life, you understand!"

Eager to reach the end, Silverblade helped kindle the fire, and when the blaze sprung up brightly, he once more offered his bosom to the test-shot. And once more Horton delayed.

"Wait yet a little, Davie," he chuckled, tearing a square of paper from a note-book, and rapidly using the stump of a pencil. "I might not find your heart without a mark to guide my aim. With this pinned over your heart, I surely can't complain if my lead goes astray!"

He quickly secured the paper in place with a pin, then looked to his rifle. Silverblade stood where the glow of the fire fell fairly upon his person, his arms extended to form a cross, a fanatical smile adding to the glow upon his haggard visage.

"Shoot, Big Horn!" his voice rung out in grim exultation. "Take sure aim and—stop!" with that smile fading, to give place to an expression of horror. "It will be your death, not mine! The lead will—"

"Too late, Silverblade!" grimly interposed the Border Beagle, making ready his weapon. "I counted that risk in the bargain. Stand fair, or own that I have won, without firing a shot!"

Silverblade resumed his former position without a word. And as the young half-blood stood proudly erect, Big Horn Buck, rifle in hand, seemed eager for the test that was to disenchant the Messiah-crazed youth.

A moment thus; then in swift succession, the suddenly uplifted rifle spoke twice, and with the second shot came a low whoop of fierce exultation from the half-blood's lips.

"You have lost, Big Horn!" he cried, one hand pointing to the painted cloth covering his bosom; no blood there! The shirt was impenetrable!

"I have won, Davie!" came the counter-cry, as Horton strode forward, to point at two holes through the shirt; one under each arm. "I shot twice. Here are four holes; where each bullet entered, then passed out at the other side. See for yourself, lad! You would have been a dead man had I shot for the heart!"

Silverblade gave a start as he lowered his eyes, guided by that triumphing finger. Through the shirt, below each arm-pit, where the cloth was stretched by his arms being extended, the bullet-holes, were apparent.

"And here, Davie, I called my shots!" laughed Horton, removing the bit of paper, to show the words he had written.

Silverblade read those words, then sunk to the ground, covering his face with trembling hands, groaning aloud in heart-rendering despair.

CHAPTER XVI.

SILVERBLADE SURRENDERS.

BIG HORN BUCK was wise enough, cool enough, not to press the point he had gained, too soon.

In silence, but with hands gentle as those of a loving mother, he covered that shivering form with the heavy blanket. Then, drawing a little to one side, he squatted down, content to bide his time.

He had studied the sensitive nature of this youth long and closely. He knew that, in some respects, it was as weak as it surely was strong in others. And knowing this, he knew, too, how terribly David Woodbridge was suffering in having the last scales of superstition so abruptly torn from over his eyes.

An hour passed by without a word being spoken, but at the end of that time, Silverblade cast the blanket-fold from over his head, looking up to meet that firm, yet loving gaze.

"Take your own time, Davie, boy," said Horton, gently. "I'd wait ten years, and count it no loss of time, just so I saved you in the end!"

The half-blood rose to his feet. He removed the ghost-shirt from his person. He gazed at it for a single breath, then—dropped it upon the fire which Horton had kept aglow!

"Thank God, David Woodbridge!" hoarsely cried Horton, springing to his feet, tears of joy dimming his honest eyes as he gripped that silently-extended hand. "I've kept my vow! I've saved my boy-pard!"

"You have, Mr. Horton," came the low, grave response. "With the ashes of that shirt, my mad dreams perish and turn to dust."

"And before the new sun comes up, we'll be on the trail which, after a crook or two, will lead us to your family!"

"No," with a grave shake of his head, as he withdrew his hand. "Not yet. I have been a fool in my blind superstition, but I will not turn even worse, now. I have work to do which even you cannot make me leave undone."

"But you promised—"

"I promised to no longer call myself Silverblade, the Hostile. I promised to become Silverblade, the Friendly. I will make that oath good, Big Horn. I will try my best to undo the evil I wrought in my blind fanaticism. But—listen, Big Horn!"

Speaking rapidly yet calmly, Silverblade told how Little Bird had twice drawn him back from the jaws of death. As considerably as he knew how, while still making all perfectly clear, he told how Little Bird had lost her heart to him.

"She is good, pure, loving, Big Horn. She has tried to open my eyes to the truth, even as you have so often tried. She failed, but she laid her heart bare before my eyes while making the attempt. I saw that all of it was mine, which was not occupied by love for her people; that she loved me first, her race next."

"But, Davie, you don't mean to marry that squaw?"

"Can I do less, yet remain an honest man? She loves her race. So do I. She will help me make them wiser, better, happier. She will pine and die, if I desert her now. It is settled, Big Horn. I will make Little Bird my wife, before God and man. And then we will labor to save, to lift up, to instruct our people. We will point out to them the White-man's Road, and teach their feet how to walk therein!"

He drew the blanket around his shoulders, reaching out a hand as for a final grip of brotherhood.

Horton accepted the hand, and gazed steadily, keenly, searchingly into those dark eyes while so doing. What he saw there choked back the arguments he might otherwise have used.

He knew that, this time, nothing he might say or do could shake the Shoshone in his determination.

"I am going to take my prisoners to General Miles, Davie. Come with me, and after you have surrendered, it will be time enough to carry out your new plans."

"No, Big Horn. I helped bring the Sioux so far toward the Bad Lands. They may refuse to listen to the words of a boy, but those words must be spoken, all the same. I am going back to camp. I am going to tell them all just what I have learned this night, and—"

"Send them howling on our trail, crazy for hair, Davie?"

"Not so, brother," with a gravely sweet smile, that lasted barely long enough for those keen eyes to catch and interpret aright. "You will have nothing to fear from my words. They will be to save, not to slay. From this hour, until his grave opens, Silverblade is the disciple of peace, not bloody war!"

"And I can't shake your resolve, in the slightest, Davie?"

"Big Horn has heard all. He is old enough to understand. Would he really turn his brother aside from the path his heart has marked out?"

There was a brief silence, during which Horton tried his best to make himself believe a bold lie would be fully justified. But he failed, and gripping that slender hand with honest vigor, he huskily cried:

"No, Davie, I won't even try it, lad! You're right, from your stand-point. I'd act the same, if I stood in your shoes—and I was good and honest enough!" he added, with a husky laugh. "You see, I can own up, Davie! I've looked upon you as a foolish, crack-brained boy, hardly fit to be trusted alone. Now—I know you're a better man than I ever was, or ever expect to be!"

"No, brother," his arm gently crossing those broad shoulders. "I have been a weak, blind fool. I am still weak, but I am wiser. I can see where I have done wrong, and I am only strong enough to resolve to make what amends I may. Now, good-by, brother!"

"Good-by, Davie, my boy!"

Their hands met in a strong, ardent grip. Their eyes, neither pair entirely free from moisture, met in a steady gaze. Then they parted, it might be forever!

The council was still in session when Silverblade, the Shoshone, regained the Sioux encampment, and pausing just without the circle, he stood with folded arms and bowed head, listening to each of the speakers in turn.

It was not altogether one-sided. Thunder Strike, in common with the majority of sub-chiefs and older warriors, seemed inclined to accept the strange happenings of that night as an omen of evil in case they should adhere firmly to their first impulse on realizing the death of Sitting Bull, their high priest and spiritual guide. But there were many among the younger, more fiery members, who urged the contrary.

If they turned back now, it would be to meet sure death, as hostiles, and deserters from the Reservation. What worse could befall them, if they obeyed the commands of their prophets, and fought to gain the Bad Lands? Not more than death, surely! And were not they assured of living again, when the Messiah came to earth?

Presently there came a lull in the talk, and one of the older warriors caught sight of the half-blood standing near. The involuntary start he gave sent other eyes in that direction, and one of the most fiery advocates of pressing onward called aloud:

"Silverblade has not spoken! Come, brother! Our ears are hungry for your words!"

Naturally enough, knowing nothing of the change which had come over that heart and brain, the brave fancied his side had gained a point as Silverblade entered that circle, gravely bowing in turn to the members.

Then Silverblade poured forth his whole heart. He spoke as no man had ever heard him speak before. But he was thoroughly converted now, and no doubts hampered his tongue.

At first the younger members of the council, those who spoke loudest for war to the death, scowled in angry chagrin as they listened, but not for many minutes. Though they differed from the speaker, they could not help feeling his intense sincerity, his perfect truth.

Then, gravely as he had entered it, Silverblade left the council, without waiting to hear what comments might be made, what arguments might be offered to combat the points he had so earnestly endeavored to make.

He had performed one duty, but another remained unfulfilled.

An hour later, he stood under the twinkling stars, holding the warm hands of Little Bird in his, speaking gravely, earnestly:

"So be it, Little Bird! From this hour, you are mine, even as I am thine. But, we both belong to our people. Are you willing to work for their welfare, child of the Cut-throat?"

"In your company, son of the Mother Snake—yes!"

Silverblade bent his head until his lips touched her upturned brow. Then he glanced upward, raising his right hand as he said:

"It is a vow, Jesus, the real and only Messiah!"

When the sun reached its meridian, the next day, the entire band of Sioux were on their way back to surrender.

And near their front rode—not Silverblade, the Hostile, but Silverblade, the apostle of peace!

THE END.

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